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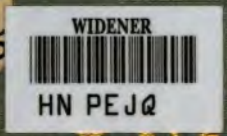


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FROM THE BOOKS
IN THE HOMESTEAD OF

Sarah Orne Jewett

AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE

BEQUEATHED BY

Theodore Jewett Eastman

A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905

1931

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## A DISCOVERY IN MORALS.

THAT'S the worst of being a child. The world is all so new and puzzling, and there is never anyone to explain anything to children, nor any way (known to them) of asking. Grown-up people feel lonely and isolated too, but it is nothing to the isolation of inarticulate childhood. Sometimes indeed the child makes an effort to understand a mysterious dispensation of Providence or Nurse, but any inquiry is sure to be silenced by a reply which makes them feel that unimagined dangers attend any



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further attempts to find out the why or wherefore of life. "Little girls shouldn't ask questions,"—investigation can hardly flourish under such a gag—or, "Don't pass rude remarks; never let me hear you say that again," and the questioner succumbs in bewilderment, submitting helplessly to a rule which silences and stupefies at the same moment. It is all so inexplicable and surprising, that one thing hardly strikes them as being more unjustifiable than another. They only feel in a blind kind of way that if 'grown-ups' hold the reins of power in such an absolute and overbearing manner there is little help to be got from them. And there is none to be had from other children either, for they all speak the same stammering tongue, and are perplexed by the same insoluble problems. Each child

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lives alone, walled about with its own ignorance and shut out mysteriously from the grown-up world of knowledge.

But in spite of their isolation and solitude most children are blest with an intuitive sense of confidence in 'Mother,' a sort of blind trust, which believes that though they are powerless to ask it, mother's help will always be forthcoming. This was just what was peculiarly lacking during the first three or four years of my childhood. One circumstance, that during those years my mother was more or less of an invalid, told almost fatally against my natural trust in her; and until my mother got better, any original shy confidence that I had, lay undeveloped within me.

The very name of "invalid" bears with it still to my mind a feeling of undefined

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dread, which I can distinctly trace to the first misty childish imaginings connected with my mother. Why! the swing door leading into Mamma's passage was formidable in itself, and the lion's head and forelegs which stared out at me from the crumpled grainings of the wood just below the handle, were symbolic of the dangers beyond. But once inside her bedroom the dangers and fears of outside were increased a hundredfold. There was the barley water which she always let me sip as a treat, and which I could hardly swallow, it tasted so nasty, though of course I felt bound to say 'thank you' for it. There was the picture above the mantelpiece, which I never could see properly because the blinds were always down, but which seemed to me to be a child dying with a horrible angel hovering above

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her. I have seen it since in daylight, and was surprised to see what a harmless waterfall it represents, and how tamely the rocks are strewn in the foreground where my 'child' had apparently lain dying in such mysterious gloom.

Then too, my mother's manner was such as comes with the schooling of suffering and weakness in sensitive natures. It was refined and gentle to a degree which puzzled and alarmed me.

"I wonder if my Tib *could* speak a shade lower," if my voice rose to the shrill scream which was its natural pitch, and I sank in a moment to the lowest depths of shame and confusion, so that my next words were scarcely audible.

Or, if my knees had been jerking against her couch with untiring persistency, when

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it became unendurable, Mamma would look at me tenderly for a moment, questioning with herself whether she could stand it for five minutes more, till bedtime would carry me off, and then in the gentlest voice would say, "Tib's knees *have* got the fidgets to-night, haven't they? Would she like to run away to the nursery now, perhaps?"

And I, only half understanding her words, would gather up my lettered bricks from the floor, and kissing her, clumsily try to scurry out of the room before that hot tear could fall and blister my much-loved playthings.

Two or three such remonstrances were enough to imbue me with a feeling of awed restraint towards my mother, and a sense gradually grew upon me that Mamma was something quite different to other people,

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more 'good' than anyone else could ever be, but at the same time, more unapproachable, and further off from me than anyone else in my little unexplored world.

A big family of older brothers and sisters left Lettie and myself, who were the only ones still in the nursery, much to ourselves, and we learnt very little from their experiences of life.

If it was a long walk that they had planned, and we begged to go too, there was a general remonstrance, "Oh, no, Tib, you and Lettie can't come," and then appealingly to Nurse or Governess, "Lettie and Tib *can't* go with us, can they? They'll lag so dreadfully and we shall never get any distance, you know, and they'll just spoil the whole walk."

With games—cricket or rounders—it was

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much the same, when we pleaded to be allowed to join. "Well, you may play if you like," and then aside to the others: "They can just run round as they like, but of course they won't 'count,'" which always brought about the desired result. "Oh, mustn't we 'count'? Then if we mayn't 'count' we don't care to play," and we would wander off by ourselves to pump water in the stable-yard or get ourselves wet through with making a very much improved bridge of stepping stones over the tiny stream at the further side of the garden.

Sometimes we felt the want of someone to confide in, but not often, for there was so much to do in the world that we had hardly time to wish for anything further. For instance, in the late autumn all the garden

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paths were strewn with dead leaves which made beautiful litter for my two wooden horses, and a splendid rustling leaf-river along which one could canter knee-deep. Then if Hemmant were clearing them up it was delightful to be allowed to heave them into the barrow, between the two flat bits of wood, and ride on the top of the pile in triumph to the rubbish heap. Work like that made a morning of complete pleasure, and if, when we rushed out after dinner, Hemmant was still at the same task, and we might help again, the whole day was one of bliss. Winter meant ice and snow, and what more in the way of amusement could one need? and spring brought out the leaves and flowers which were so useful for helping out stone feasts, which sometimes *were* a little dull if there was nothing

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but stones. And then, how nice it was to walk round the hawthorn hedge eating the tiny "bread and cheese" shoots off the bushes without touching them with our fingers, so that I felt almost as if I were a real horse, and as though I couldn't have used my hands, even if I had wanted to, ever so badly. It was a great deal better than eating grass, for that is very stringy and cuts one's lips, and I never managed to eat more than a blade or two at a time, partly because of the stringiness, and partly because you can't breathe very well while your mouth is on the ground and your head feels as though it were going to burst. But I could go on eating the hawthorn shoots for quite a long while, so that I felt almost as though I were having a proper meal,—and horses do eat hedges as well as

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grass, you know. Lettie did not care about horses, and so of course she did not care particularly about eating their things, but there was always plenty else for her to do. In fact, we never had any difficulty in finding something to amuse ourselves with.

I am speaking of fine days now, of course. I ought to have said so before, for wet days were a very different matter. On wet days I always "got naughty." I never could tell why it was that "Naughty Temper" always came then. Certainly he did. I say 'he,' for Nurse's moral language always led me to believe in Naughty Temper as a sort of semi-religious demon, whose actions, although apparently quite independent of my own, and influencing me from without, I was yet in some unexplained way responsible for. My case always seemed

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the harder from the fact that Lettie was much more rarely overcome by these invasions of naughtiness than I was, and when I was most outcast her virtue was always most marked and obvious.

On the day on which one of the greatest and most fatal experiments of my childhood took place, Naughty Temper had been throughout a terribly frequent visitor. In fact he had beset me the very first thing in the morning, before I had been dressed, before I had had my bath—before even I had said my prayers—so that, as Nurse said, "I had begun the day with sin, and it was not likely I should end it differently."

For two or three weeks past, as soon as I jumped out of bed, I had always, before anything else, gone to the window, and opening the casement, had stretched my

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hand down through the ivy leaves till I could feel the warm nest of a family of sparrows, whose careers I was watching with an almost maternal interest. But this morning as I pushed back the window a shower of cold drops fell from the window-frame above, upon my warm wrist and clean nightgown sleeve. I knew that if I was discovered now there was no chance of my reaching the sparrows. My first calculation was that I could do it all so noiselessly that I might accomplish my desire without Nurse's knowing anything about it. But then, oh! ought I to tell? ought I to seal my own fate by telling Nurse what she was too sleepy to find out for herself? *Must* I say, "Nurse, it's raining," and then hear her say, "You're not to open that window; get back into bed

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this minute." *Must* I? Yes; though I could not say why, I felt it would be mean not to; and perhaps if I was good and told her, Nurse *might* let me just put out my hand for one moment's visit to that soft downy warmth below.

So I turned from the rainy window towards the drowsy face in the big bed, and said shrilly, "Nurse, it's raining—quite hard." There should be no shirking the horrid fact.

Then a pause, and Nurse rubbed her eyes.

"What are you doing at the window?" she asked; and then the situation suddenly dawning upon her, "Get down from that window-seat at once."

"Nurse," very humbly, "I may just feel for the sparrows' nest first, mayn't I? I

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shan't get wet." Those were days when I had not yet learnt stratagem, and bitter truth was the only weapon I could wield for self-advancement.

"Get down this instant! Don't you know I never allow either of you up at that window before you're dressed? How many times am I going to tell you to get down?"

I drew the window back again, and sliding down upon the cold polished window-seat, burst into a storm of tears. Lettie sat up in her crib, gazed at me disconsolately, and then gave way to a fit of sympathetic crying. But the sorrow was not hers, and she soon stopped, and fell comfortably asleep again, for it was still very early.

When at last the springs of my grief

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were nearly exhausted, and my body was almost under control again, except for periodic sobs, which threatened to shake down my tears afresh, I began to think over Nurse's remarks. They did not quite tally with facts. I had been allowed to open the window and put my hand out to feel the nest for ever so many days, and yet Nurse said that I knew I was never allowed to get up there at all. How could she say such things? And to-day the sparrows might even be fledged, and be able to fly away, and then I should never feel my darling sparrows again.

The thought was unendurable, and I cried again (though very softly now, for Nurse was snoring), and cried, and only longed to cry on.

I should never be happy again—I hoped

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I never might be. Nurse would never be kind again, but I did not want her kindness now that the one thing I really longed for she had denied me. Everything was wrong, miserable, and wretched, and I hugged my fat warm knees until I sobbed myself to sleep.

That was a very bad beginning to the day, but my second sin was worse than the first.

It happened thus. After breakfast I looked out of window. It was still raining.

"Now you're not to be getting up to any of your rackets," said Nurse, as she bustled round. "Lettie's poorly, and you must consider her for once."

Lettie was settling herself into the big armchair by the fireside, with her face framed in a huge silk handkerchief, so I



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supposed she had ear-ache, and I gathered from Nurse's manner that I was to consider myself distinctly inferior to Lettie until the handkerchief should be taken off.

What should I do?

I stood on the window-seat for some time watching the rain slowly gather on a large dead ivy-leaf till a round drop hung from the point, and then suddenly made up its mind and jumped down on to the woodwork below. But when I had watched this process till I could say "Now!" almost exactly as each raindrop jumped, I got tired. I thought scornfully of the little child in the poem who apostrophizes the raindrops with—

"Oh! where do you come from, you little drops of rain,
Pitter patter, pitter patter, on the window pane?"

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"Just like the children in books," I thought, "they always talk to all sorts of things that can't answer them. As if it would be any fun, either, to ask the raindrops anything! I know that they come out of the clouds, and I suppose the cloud is a sort of bag, and when too many raindrops have got in, the raindrops burst the cloud, and they rush out and come down here. But how I do wish so many wouldn't get in and burst it, because it's horrid when it rains."

Thereupon I got down from the window-seat, and spent the next hour or two in intense absorption over a tangle of string, with which I hoped to solve the difficult problems of how to plait, and how to tie a bow, both of which had quite nonplussed me till now.

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I was in a far dream-land, in which, having learnt to plait better than anyone ever plaited before, all the people from far and near came to me to get things plaited, and gave me so much money that I was able to make all the beggars perfectly rich, and buy myself, as well, a horse with a real horsehair mane—when Nurse called to me to put away all my 'muddles,' because it had stopped raining, and I must go out.

To travel back from the dim land of day-dreams to the commonplace sunlit atmosphere of the nursery takes a long while, and Nurse's words fell upon half-deaf ears and dazed senses.

So I answered vaguely, "But it's raining, Nurse."

"Oh! what a contradictious little thing

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you are, to be sure. I believe you'd contradict your own mother. And when I've particularly told you it's not raining, you go setting up your own opinion against mine, as if there was nothing wrong in always being so obstinate and 'spertinacious,' when you know it's one of the things that's most displeasing to God for children not to give in to what their elders tell them is right. I suppose you don't think I know a great deal better what is right than you do," and Nurse whisked off the last button on my boot as she said this, which seemed to add greatly to the dramatic effect of her words—in her own eyes at least.

My hat and jacket put on, I was ready to go out.

"Now, don't go on the grass, nor go messing yourself up with the water-butt,

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mind; and come in if it rains. Don't forget about going on the grass."

"All right," I cried, as I flew down the nursery passage, in the vain attempt to reach the head of the stairs before I heard the low thud of the nursery door as it swung to again.

"What a bother about not going on the grass! I *did* want to let the rabbits have a run, and now I can't," I thought. "I am sure they were expecting it to-day, for they didn't have a run yesterday, and they know when they haven't been out for two days."

But Nurse's commands had a strength which compelled the most absolute obedience, and I did not dream of violating them. So I sauntered round to the rabbit-hutches with some freshly gathered carrot

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leaves to console the soft creatures. The carrot beds were soaking, and as I plunged across them, tugging off the best-looking heads, the feathery sprays poured little showers down my bare legs and made my frock cling miserably about my knees. But *this* was not disobeying Nurse's orders, and my conscience lay quite peacefully asleep, for it had, of course, never occurred to me to ask myself *why* certain things were forbidden—it was doubtless arranged according to Nurse's good pleasure; and as for avoiding the bad results, that never entered into my head. It was "going on the grass," not "getting wet" which Nurse had forbidden, and I obeyed the letter of the law.

As a matter of fact, I was not a naturally disobedient child, and Nurse's warn-

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ings against sin were alarming enough to frighten a much more hardened sinner than I was. I knew that God was angry with disobedient children—of course He was always on Nurse's side—and I dreaded the thought of entering into this alarming though indefinite relation with the Almighty. Besides the immediate punishment for disobeying, as for everything else, was sitting alone in the night-nursery till Nurse should be satisfied that I was in a fitly penitent frame of mind. *That* was the punishment here and now, and of course if I offended too many times I should have to go to hell when I died.

The rabbits fed and condoled with, I turned my steps to the water-butt close at hand, which received the drainings from the tool-shed roof. Here was employment

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for a long while, and I stood on an upturned pot beside it and flung all the big stones I could find into its green slimy depths,—my ambition being to make a splash which should reach the top of the tool-shed window. Just as I had plunged in an enormous stone, and the answering water-spout had risen to the desired place, the faint tingle of the nursery bell, hardly audible to a less alert pair of ears than my childish ones, sounded, calling me in from my absorbing occupation. I dropped the stone I held ready to throw, and ran up the path towards the house. As I ran I pictured my entrance into the nursery, and instantly there rose in my mind the remembrance of Nurse's injunctions before I went out, and oh! what should I do?—I had been at the water-butt—the very place

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she had told me not to go to. Till that moment I seemed never to have taken in what it was that Nurse had said about it. But how could I explain this? Guilty tears filled my eyes as I toiled, right foot always foremost, up the nursery stairs.

Fortunately detection was speedy, or I might have been tempted to shield myself by an excuse; and the usual punishment of sitting alone in the night-nursery followed.

After the flood of tears, which always came upon conviction for a fault, and the awful consciousness of guilt which it brought about, I relapsed into a less agitated train of thought.

I was thinking dreamily about heaven, and how wonderful it was that God could always see me. Could He see, for in-

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stance, and did He notice, that I had a button off my boot, or did He overlook *some* things and only trouble about what was actually either good or naughty? I did not know. And then Nurse said that He was always taking care of me, every minute. Didn't He ever leave me alone at all? I supposed not. But surely if He saw that I was sitting on this chair, and knew that Nurse had made up her mind not to come in for say twenty minutes, He might leave me at any rate for a little while. But no; I hardly thought He would. Then I went on to try to imagine what would happen supposing for any reason He did leave me. I should probably fall down through some sort of vast open space and die. No, not exactly die, because then God would have to decide whether I

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was to go to heaven or hell, and then I should be once more in His keeping, and in that case I should be just sitting here in the night-nursery again, for all the world as I was doing at this moment. I could not make up my mind what would happen, and I felt it would be almost worth while to try the experiment. What time could be better than now when I had nothing else to do or think about? I would ask God to leave off taking care of me,—but then, perhaps I should 'go' so fast that I shouldn't be able to pray to Him to take care of me again.

In view of this danger I composed a prayer: "Oh! please God, leave off taking care of me just for one single second, and then take care of me again." I did not pray this at once; I only *said* it to myself to make sure that it would be quite safe.—

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I had an uncomfortable feeling that it was very naughty, but I couldn't see why it should be so, and if it was, as Nurse said, only because God was so kind that He took care of me always, I did not see why I might not ask Him to stop doing it for a moment.

So at last, with the excitement of trying a risky experiment, I prayed, even then half incredulous of success, and waited to see whether I felt any difference.

No, breathless and motionless as I sat, with eyes staring and ears strained, I could perceive no change whatever in myself or in my surroundings. The sewing-machine in the nursery still purred on; little Samuel still knelt in the picture on the wall opposite me, with the yellow light still firmly streaming upon him, and the blue-bottle who had

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been keeping up a continual "fizzle" was still fighting at the window-pane. I set myself rigidly, and tried again to feel the sort of falling or collapse which I had imagined. Still I felt nothing, and I had at last to give up the effort, and believe that for some reason which perhaps I was not quite old enough to understand, God would not let go of my still-sobbing body.

It was disappointing, but I was not altogether surprised, for my prayers were very rarely answered as I hoped they would be. Nevertheless, I resolved to try again, but not just now, for was not that the creaking of the nursery door-handle, and if so, might it not be possible that Nurse was coming to let me out? So I gave up experimenting, and listened with all my ears.

These was an indistinct murmur of

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voices at the nursery end of the passage, and I fancied I detected the web and woof of a hurried conversation between Nurse and the housemaid; Nurse, no doubt, giving a full account of my sin. I heard a ". . . don't *say* so" from Jane, and was almost grateful to her for showing surprise at my guilt. A few seconds more and I caught "always *was* so particular about . . ." in Nurse's unmistakable accents, and I supplied instantly what I was convinced was the missing context, making it a pointed reference to myself.

But the important thing was, whether Nurse was on her way to let me out. I stared at the brass handle of the door, to catch the slightest signs of movement in the well-known scratch on its side, and listened to the modulations of the voices,

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with held breath, till at last the sounds died away, Nurse went downstairs, the housemaid returned to her work in one of the bedrooms, and hope left the field to despair.

I do not know how long afterwards it was—it seemed an immeasurably long time to me—that the door opened quickly and Nurse hurried in. She was evidently looking for something—her thimble, probably—and had forgotten my existence. On seeing my tear-stained face, however, she remembered her position towards me of righteous judge, and forsaking her errand, she said she had come to see whether I was a good child now.

I said I was sorry for what I had done (this was the form of reply by which pardon and release were obtained), and she told

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me magnanimously that she would forgive me. I was very grateful, and asked if she would kiss me (this was also part of the formal programme), which granted, I felt that I was at liberty to go and be as happy as was possible with the sin of disobedience throwing its melancholy shadow over any future efforts at goodness for that day.

The afternoon was wet again. It was very depressing; and even horse-chestnuts palled in interest after awhile, until a brilliant idea came to me. I would fill my pinafore with the great brown things, and carry them down the passage to Lucy's room. Lucy was the eldest of the family, and, with the dignity of sixteen years, seemed to us a very far-off personage. But I could not resist the pleasure of seeing her surprise when she should find such



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a beautiful present of chestnuts as I would make her, upon the very middle of her bed. It probably will not strike any one else as being a superlatively fascinating scheme, and I cannot find words in grown-up language to express the exact reason of my delight. But delightful it certainly was, and when after an immense amount of scrambling upon the bed, and rummaging beneath it for chestnuts which *would* roll to the most remote corners, I had finished my heap, I contemplated it with a satisfaction which I thought even the dull soul of a grown-up person must share.

Then I turned back to the nursery, silent but satisfied, and found tea ready. I had just begun a huge slice of bread and butter, which I meant to bite into arches, so that it could span my plate like a bridge,

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when Lucy opened the door and came in, looking fearfully earnest and eager.

"Nurse," she said, "do you know if the boys have been in my bedroom making a hideous mess with chestnuts on the bed? It's too disgusting of them, if they did it, and I don't know who else it could be," and as she spoke she stooped over me and kissed my forehead, for the rest of my face was all bread-and-buttery.

"The boys haven't been near your room all the afternoon, miss," said Nurse, "and Lettie I have put to bed, she seemed so upset with her ear-ache. I expect it's Tib has been doing it."

"Tib!" said Lucy, altering her tone to a much more merciful one, than when the boys had been the supposed culprits. "Did Tib put chestnuts on Lucy's bed, dear?"

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"No," I said, solemnly. I was making an experiment. Would Lucy find out, if I didn't tell her, I wondered. The whole pleasure of my present-giving was that it should be a secret, and it would spoil it all if I told now.

"Didn't she, Tib dear?" urged Lucy again.

"No," I repeated as before.

"Why, but I see her go along with her pinafore full, just as I come upstairs with the milk,—straight to Miss Lucy's door," ejaculated the gaping nursery-maid, who had only just arrived at the sense of the conversation. "Oh! just fancy her telling such dreadful stories."

"Oh! Tib, how could you say you didn't?" said Lucy. "Why, Phœbe says she saw you go."

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"No, I didn't go," I said, and then burst into tears, for I could bear this general accusation no longer.

My tears only showed still more plainly that I was guilty. There was a chorus of dismay and horror.

"Oh! how she does persist in it!" "Well, I never! saying it three times over like that!" and, "Tib! how *can* you go on telling untruths in this dreadful way?" This from Lucy.

"I don't know what an 'untruth' is, and I *didn't* want you to know it was me who put the chestnuts, because I *did* want you to be surprised," I moaned out from the bitterness of my tears.

"Oh! if they would only leave me alone or tell me why I was naughty, I could bear it," I thought, but this bewilderment was

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more than I could stand, and I cried on in despair.

"Finish up that bread and butter," said Nurse, "and then I shall just send her into the next room. It's the best way of making her feel it," she continued aside.

I munched on. It would have been impertinent to a degree if I had ventured to go on with the bridge pattern (besides, I had no heart for such devices now), and my salt tears mixed disagreeably with the already salt butter.

I saw that I had done wrong; *that* was obvious from the way I was treated, but exactly what my crime was, or why it was a crime was a complete mystery to me. I had certainly tried to prevent Lucy from discovering my secret, and Phœbe, meanly as it seemed to me, had let it all out, yet

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*she* didn't seem to feel as though she had done anything blameworthy, but on the contrary was joining in the chorus of accusers. I could not make it out. I recalled the many times when the boys had puzzled Lettie and me with what always seemed a direct denial of what they had done, and yet no one ever blamed them for doing so. "Do you *know*" (with an accent on the opening phrase, which made them doubtless feel quite conscience-clear), "that your rabbits could say 'Good morning,' if they tried?" was a never-ending source of mystery to us, and if that was not an untruth, what was? But they always declared "it was perfectly true, honour bright," so I did not feel that it was possible to know truth from falsehood. I did not of course doubt for a moment the present nursery

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judgment, only it would have been a comfort to understand it, so as to guard against such misery as this in future.

The last mouthful of bitter black crust was swallowed, and Nurse carried me off to my stool of punishment in the nursery store and linen-room, which did instead of the night-nursery on this occasion, as Lettie was already in bed. She took me on her lap before she left me to my solitude, and explained to me, in rather mystifying phrases, what I had done.

"I can't think," her monologue ended, "how you *could* be such a sinful child as to go and tell a lie to your dear, kind sister like that, when you know how displeasing it is in God's sight. To go and say something that isn't true,—why, it's one of the most wicked things any one can do, and all

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liars, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, they go to hell and live for ever and ever with all the other wicked people who haven't done what God told them; and you'll go and burn in the lake of fire and brimstone"—her words grew more awfully personal and authoritative as she rose into the confidence of Bible and Methodistic language—"and there'll be no salvation for you, and you'll never go to heaven to be among the blessed ones, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." And so she went on, complacently dividing the world into the good and the evil, with a certainty which showed her almost inhuman narrowness, rather than the superhuman knowledge which alone could have warranted it. I quite felt that my heap of chestnuts was in some way

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distinctly the result of Satanic craft and subtlety, and that she, Lucy, and Phœbe were as distinctly prompted by God to discover my sin and punish it. I acquiesced, too, in her view that I was among the Wicked, and she among the Good. What child indeed does not feel this, who sees the earthly powers ranging themselves together, and proclaiming themselves to be the righteous, while it is held at a distance and assured that it belongs to the opposite camp? My consciousness of right and wrong was, in fact, far too hazy to rise up and contradict Nurse's sentence, and when I was at last left to myself it was with an almost hopeless conviction of my hideous guilt.

"Was I really a 'liar,' and if so, was there no chance for me? Did a 'liar'

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mean a person who had only told *one* lie as I had, and would my never telling another, help me not at all?" I could only wonder and fear, and then exercise my vividly literal imagination, in picturing the torments of hell. Again and again I strained my mind to imagine being burnt for ever and ever and ever and ever. . . . (I found myself carrying on the repetition of these awful but meaningless words long after I had passed beyond the actual idea.) Then, the lake of fire and brimstone. I did not know what brimstone was, but I fancied I had heard that it smelt. Probably it smelt like the room where the boots were cleaned, which I could never stay in without holding my nose. Oh! what should I do, if hell really smelt as bad as that? and possibly it smelt worse. Of

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course, Nurse would go to heaven; she always went to chapel on Sundays, sang hymns when she was at work, did not allow me to turn over the leaves of her Bible, and spoke quite confidently about going "to be with the saints" when she died. Mamma and Lucy would be there too, no doubt. They were grown-up and seemed to have no wish to fly into passions, so God could have no fault to find with them. Papa would go, I thought, and Lettie, for she hadn't been naughty nor had to be punished for ever so long; and the people whom I watched going to church on Sundays would go too. But if *they* all went, that would mean that Mrs. Drummond would be among them. She was the thin waxy-faced widow, who always went by to church very early with her four or five pinch-faced,

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greasy-haired children, all clad in the deepest and most conspicuous mourning. Of course *she* would go to heaven, and probably the children, too, but that was a more remote contingency. She looked so dismal and hopeless and red-eyed that there wasn't a chance of her not being good enough go there. And if *she* went, I didn't know whether I could go too; it would be dreadful to be in the same place where she was and have to sing the same songs of praise, and perhaps even have to stand next her in the 'heavenly choir' which Nurse talked about, and to stand there for ever and ever, without any hope of getting away from her at all! Still, though heaven was only very doubtful happiness, it must be better than hell, which was certain misery, and yet that was the place to which

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I was going, just because I had tried to keep my secret about the chestnut heap from Lucy.

While I had been shut off from the outward and visible world, and had been painfully trying to realize the unknown and invisible one, everything in the house had gone on perfectly regardless of myself and the mental excitement I was going through.

Mamma, feeling herself stronger than for some days past, had ordered a fire to be lit in the drawing-room, had been carried down there, visitors had called and had tea; and now as she was waiting for Papa to come in, she had rung the bell and asked whether Lettie and Tib were not coming down to say 'good-night.'

Nurse herself went down to explain why we could neither of us appear.

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"Tib has told an untruth?" exclaimed Mamma. "I can't believe she meant to do so, Nurse. Bring her down to me, please, I must speak to her myself."

Perhaps her conscience smote her that she had let even the long weeks and months of weariness prevent her from knowing the innermost hearts of her children, and she thought of the many lesser sins about which she had known nothing which must surely have led up to this serious one. Or was it, perhaps, the unquenchable mother-instinct which feels that mother is all that is needed to banish sorrows from her child's path, that spoke within her? Anyway, though too late to retrieve the evil that had been done,—for hellish horrors and the avenging cruelty of God could not be blotted out from my mind

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for long years to come,—at last help came to me in my distress.

Not a little anxious lest my punishment should have seemed too severe according to Mamma's laxer code, Nurse tried to reassure herself by impressing upon me my mother's horror at my sin.

"Your Mamma's heard of what you've been doing, Miss Tib, and she's so shocked, she says she must see you at once."

My two red cheeks were stiff with dried-up tears, my eyes were sodden and weary, and my hands were clammy with the sort of fever that comes with excessive crying. I was so much worn out with my grief that I hardly dreaded this, which would have been usually a great ordeal. Was I not to be miserable for ever? Even to be dis-

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graced in Mamma's eyes did not seem to add much to the punishment. So I stood silently while my face and hands were sponged, and my hair smoothed, and then followed Nurse passively downstairs.

The drawing-room was unlighted, except for the flickering firelight that played upon the ceiling, and the few chairs which stood close to the hearth. The two deep bow windows were dark, save for the sad inky gleam which still hung faintly in the western rain-spread sky, and you could only just see the dim outline of the sycamores and chestnut trees outside. Mamma's sofa was near the fire, but just out of reach of its direct light.

"Tib, darling, fetch a stool and come and tell Mamma what it is she has been doing. Nurse says you've told a lie. What does it all mean, dearest?"



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Something—an irrepressible gentleness, I think it was—in my mother's tone, made me feel at once, that somehow that dark passage of my life that had begun with Lucy's question about the chestnut heap, had come to a sudden end; that say what Nurse would, I should not be thrust back into the horrible pit, and that a way of escape would be made for me. Hell and the lake of brimstone seemed to become again only dimly possible, instead of, as just now they had appeared, the only things which could happen to me; and as I listened to Mamma's gentle voice, and felt those comfortable kisses which came when words could not say enough, heaven and its happiness became once more the important features of an after life.

I had told Mamma everything: how I

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never knew that it was naughty to tell a lie, how I came to put the chestnuts, and how very much I wanted to keep them secret, and Mamma was telling me about heaven,—that there would be rabbits for me to play with, and dear little children and soft green meadows with lovely streams running through them, and lambs feeding there who would let me stroke them as much as I liked,—when Papa came in.

"Hullo, Tib, so *you're* keeping Mamma company," he said, and then swung me up to sit astride of his neck. "Surely it's this young woman's bedtime, isn't it, Mamma? Very well, then, you shall ride upstairs to-night," and at a glorious canter he bore me away to the nursery.

"There, put her to bed quickly, Nurse; she looks tired; and give Papa a nice hug for

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being such a good horse," he said, as he stood me, in defiance of all nursery rules, upon the table.

Ten minutes later I was fast asleep, and Nurse as she looked at me feared lest she had been remiss in her duty towards me, seeing that I could so soon forget her warnings. There was no need for her to trouble herself about it, for I still dislike the sight of horse-chestnuts, except in the open air, and to smell the bitter dry scent which comes after a few days' keeping is like a poisonous waft from a childish purgatory.

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## THE EMU AND THE HOME OF REST.

IT was summer time, and the air of the nursery was heavy with the smell of the gas-stove, which meant that the weather was too hot for a fire even there. Mamma, who of late had become the most important person in the world, was away, and life was altogether a burden. My hair clustering about my neck made me feel hot and stuffy, and I longed for something—anything—*what*, I did not know.

We had tea early, the butter was oily, and lent itself to thin spreading; the crusts were very black; the present was very

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dreary, and as for the future I did not know there was such a thing. When I promised, after an outburst of 'naughty temper,' to try to do better for the "Fuchsia," I did not of course recognize the word disguised in the mysterious botanico-moral form in which my misunderstanding clothed it; and even if I had done so, it would certainly not have led me to expect that the future would be in any way better than the present.

It would have been some relief to be naughty now, but there was no provocation, and I was not inventive. So I languidly finished my tea, and tried to imagine that I was a little girl eating her tea in some country very far away. But that did not divert me much, as I could not think of any way in which the "other little girl" should be different from myself. It was a relief to

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find that Nurse had planned to take us for a walk in the cool of the late afternoon, and we accordingly set off after tea.

The air was full of the shouts of children playing on the green now that school was over. This summer evening sound had always for me a most distressing meaning,—it was a vague suggestion of numberless unknown people clamouring without the confines of my universe, seeming, as it were, to seek admittance; people whom I never could know, and whom I should have dreaded to know, if it had been possible. There were girls with rough towzled hair, who chased across the green in pursuit of big boys; babies without hat or cloak, who rolled about in the thin dusty grass, and children who swung on bits of frayed rope twisted round feeble railings. Now and then a

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mother would come out from one of the cottages, which huddled up to the edge of the green at the further side, and after vainly trying to make a shrill voice effect what only bodily presence could, would finally saunter towards the swarm of children, clutch up one of her own offspring and carry back to the cottage its sprawling confusion of legs, petticoats, and arms. The sight of these scenes as I could see them from behind the thick lime tree screen, which stood between our nursery windows and the green, disgusted me. I was interested in the children, knew their division into families, had speculations as to the ages of each, and invented theories to account for the occasional disappearance of any of them, but I loathed the whole manner of their life as something unseemly, ugly and

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painful, and their shrill cries epitomized for me the whole of my sensations.

There were certain roads and streets which I could not bear, and as often as Nurse decided that our walk should lie along one of these, so often did a feeling of inexplicable dreariness come over me, and I had to force up all my courage to carry me through the ordeal before me. Other walks alarmed me, there was a gate perhaps, which roused in me a dim fear that we should find it closed when we came back, or the name sounded alarming, as in the case of "Cut throat Lane," of which certainly the "elder ones" seemed able to speak jestingly. But as I did not feel at all sure that there was no danger of having my own throat cut, I thought it prudent to avoid even mentioning the name, except

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when a show of boldness was absolutely required of me, and I used every available stratagem to avoid going down it. When we came into it from the lower end it certainly did not feel so dangerous, it was fairly broad, and it grew narrower almost without one's noticing it, but to go into it from the upper end where the whole sense of its narrowness came upon you suddenly and at once, was not worth the risk, even supposing that to be infinitely slight.

But it was different with other walks, the melancholy ones. There, there was nothing which frightened me, I felt as safe as on even the pleasantest roads, but a heavy sense of gloom, which I could neither shake off nor account for to myself, weighed upon me all the way.

The "Emu Walk," and the "Home of

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Rest Walk" were identical in so far as a great part of the way was the same. But the directest route to the Home of Rest did not take you past the Emu at all. Before you reached the Home of Rest you had to branch off to the right into a field.

Now the Emu was a discovery, the glory and the renown of which belonged entirely to Lettie and myself, and for some time it shed a sort of dignity over our nursery walks, which were in general despised of the "elder ones." It happened thus. Instead of taking us out to the still green country on this sultry summer evening, Nurse steered her course for a walk which led us into a most melancholy region. The first part of it, however, I did not much mind; the street was lively, the houses and shops were quiet and comfortable-looking, the whole

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was very familiar, and it was only when we turned off from the main road that I realized afresh how I hated to go this particular way. On the left hand side of the road was a featureless yellow brick wall, from above which rose a steep turf bank. It looked like the grass mound of some gigantic grave, and there was no comfort in knowing that it was called a 'reservoir.' On the opposite side were quaint little white plastered houses for a space, leading immediately to a foreign looking building, much bedaubed with granular stucco, over which presided a wretchedly executed stone figure of St. Aloysius, as was notified above in large letters. This always made me feel puzzled and consequently 'creepy.' To begin with, I could not pronounce the name, which made me suspicious that there was

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something strange and unusual about the place, and besides this, a dim connection existed in my mind between it and Roman Catholics, a term which floated always through my brain, as an utterly indistinct abstraction of all that was malign and dangerous. What or who Roman Catholics were, or how they tainted St. Aloysius's Seminary for Boys, I did not dream of asking, but the thought of them made me eye St. Aloysius with a deep mistrust, and made me feel that his road was altogether an unpleasant place.

Just beyond the 'reservoir' on the left, a narrow lane went steeply down behind a block of buildings, which probably contained some of the machinery for pumping water into the tanks. All I certainly know about them is, that sometimes when

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we had passed by, we had heard sounds like colossal panting, which seemed to me to fill the air rather than to come from any one place, and even Nurse had not been able to tell us what they meant, or anything about them. To-day, the dull thud was very ominous to me, but I made up my mind not to say anything about it, as I felt I had hardly presumption enough to give it a name, and if possible it was better to try to ignore it, even to myself.

The thud was barely out of hearing, when we came out upon the viaduct, which was really the chief element in my dislike of the road. As we stood upon it, and looked through the openings in the stone balustrade, we could see ever so far below us another road—even more hateful to me than the upper one. Along it passed

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manure carts, brick carts, and funerals. I remember no cheerfuller traffic. Funerals were unutterably dreadful, and the painfulness was intensified by their slow pace, which made it probable that if you fell in with one on first striking the road, you would hardly shake yourself free of its grim company, as far as your ways lay together. Mingled with these hateful sights was the poisonous breath of the distant brick-fields. The steep embankment through which the lower road had been cut in old coaching days, was covered with elder bushes—dingiest shrub that Nature ever invented—and among them were thousands of smutty sparrows, and thousands of shells of orange peel. No wonder I could not bear the place!

It is curious that I have no remembrance

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of any sort of conversation during these walks. I suppose they were probably silent occasions:—we two little mortals, led by the hand in this world still so foreign to us; our interpreter knowing but little of our language, and having nothing in her own to communicate.

"Now we must turn home," said Nurse, when we had gone some way on the further side of the viaduct. But at that moment, we were both seized with a desire to explore a field path, which we saw on the opposite side of the road, and which we had never noticed before; and Nurse finally gave way to our entreaties. My first impression, as I passed through the swing gate, was one of fear. The field sloped steeply down below us, and beyond the heavy elms, which skirted the bottom, was

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a wide view of the distant city. Above it hung a tawny cloud of smoke. All the sky was leaden with heat, and some of the nearer houses reflected an unearthly white glare. I could not have borne to look at it long, but a distraction was close at hand. One of the upper corners of the field was railed off with a peculiar high railing, behind which a huge bird was stalking to and fro. At once we became wildly excited. I rapidly developed plans for getting to know its owner, who should considerately die almost at once, leaving the bird to me; or, failing to die, should present it to me on my next birthday, saying that he could see the bird loved me much better than him, and he, therefore, wished me to keep it for my own.

We called it in the most coaxing lan-



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guage we could think of, ransacked our pockets for biscuits, and finally satisfied our highest ambition, when the creature gobbled up a lump of sugar, which Lettie discovered in a retired corner of her pocket, and flung into the grass at its feet.

The field, with its sombre city view, its suburban-looking hedges, torn and worn by endless boys and tramps, was changed into a land of adventure. I felt that we were privileged beings. I imagined that no one from our own familiar home neighbourhood, ever had, or ever would penetrate, to this wonderful field with its wonderful bird. Nansen would probably care less about floating with his icebergs across the North Pole, if it were a well-known thoroughfare, and I felt happier to think that no one but ourselves had ever looked upon our

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grand discovery. There was no fear, for instance, that the family of red-cloaked children whom we often met in our usual walks, and whom I disliked, because they were so pretty,—there was no fear that *they* had ever had the pleasure of feeding our bird.

So we went home elated.

The "elder ones" pronounced our description to be that of an Emu, and we kept the discovery as a grand piece of news against Mamma's return.

It was late autumn before we made another expedition to the Emu field, and then we went with our pockets crammed with biscuits, sugar, and canary seed. St. Aloysius and the pulsing engines we passed unheeding by; we did not pause, as was our wont, to look through the stone balustrade of the viaduct; and when we

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reached the little swing gate, we squeezed through together, and ran towards the iron railings. But there, alas! no bird! There was a sort of rough shed, at the far side of the enclosure, but it looked too low and small to conceal the Emu. We gazed hopelessly at the deserted ground. My first impulse was to try to do something to alter this blasting decree of fate.

"Nurse, what *shall* we do? How *can* we see the Emu again?" I pleaded piteously.

"Oh! I daresay he's gone and hidden himself somewhere," said Nurse evasively, "or his master's put him somewhere else."

"Where do you think his master lives?" I inquired with a vague idea of taking active steps.

"Oh, I don't know, dear!" said Nurse.

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"Perhaps that's his house behind the trees there. But it's no use you looking through the railings any more. You can see the poor Emu's not anywhere about."

"Poor Emu!" the words shot a suggestion of disaster into my thoughts.

"Do you think he can be dead?" I asked. I had not realized till that moment that emus did die.

"Well, perhaps he is," said Nurse, who fancied my question desired an answer in the affirmative, and I walked home, silently trying to fill in the details of the tragedy which had been so slightly sketched.

Still neither Lettie nor I quite gave up the hope that we should one day see the Emu again. Plausible as the death theory was, we felt that the world was teeming with unimagined other possibilities, which

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might account for his disappearance in some less final way.

So from time to time, through the winter, we persuaded Nurse to take us along the dreary road in the faint hope of finding the Emu again, and once when we had almost given up all expectation, we saw to our joy his strange form behind the iron bars. This time, however, he refused to pay any heed to our shrill calls, and stood, looking shabby and dreary, beside the wooden shed. No doubt the cold English winter had sapped his strength, and the "poor Emu" must have died very soon afterwards. Certainly, we never saw him again.

At the time, of course, we did not dream of such a sad ending to all our hopes. Our expectations were rekindled, and we felt that now there was every reason to look for

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his reappearance on future occasions, in spite of long absences between whiles.

Very often, therefore, did we visit the place, and as often came back unsuccessful.

One stuffy spring morning we dragged ourselves wearily along to the place of frequent disappointment. The Emu was not there, and Nurse had a mind to go further. We passed through the field and went down a narrow footpath lane which led us out into a wilderness of yellow brick houses, a *terra incognita* to us. I was already bewildered and distressed, and my distress was increased a hundredfold, when Nurse stopped before a large gateway, above which on a flamboyant scroll were painted the words "Home of Rest for Aged Pilgrims, 1857."

All institutions were disagreeable to me;

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they were impersonal, unnatural, unhome-like, and I could not understand what they were, or what they were for. This one seemed particularly alarming. The words "Home of Rest" told me absolutely nothing, and "Pilgrims" only suggested the mythical beings who figured in hymns, supernatural, religious kind of creatures, who must be disagreeable.

Nurse vouchsafed no explanation of these mysteries, but led us silently in through the gateway. Inside was an awful respectability and emptiness. On three sides of the blank grass lawn were tiny, one-storeyed houses, with ornamental wooden verandahs in front, and as we approached them I saw that there was a short text above the lintel of each door,—an added proof that this was a place somehow in close connection with the

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painful ideas of Sundays, heaven, angels, hymn singing, good people, and death. Before I had realized to the full the ghastliness of our situation, we were sitting on a bench in the verandah alone, and Nurse had disappeared, I knew not where. I did not explain my terror to Lettie; how could I have done so? Besides, she understood it without the need of words.

She mingled exhortation and comfort. "Don't be frightened, please; and *please* don't cry or else some one'll hear you. There's no one here to be frightened of, and I'm sure Nurse'll be back soon."

Poor Lettie! She had little store of comfort, for her own heart was beating fast and her blue eyes were wide, with the same indefinite fear which had filled mine with tears; still she acted her part of comforter

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bravely, although it was entirely ineffectual. My lusty sobs greatly added to our danger from her point of view, for they would probably attract notice, and bring upon us the officious help of unknown people. I, for my part, having got beyond calculations of prudence, gave myself up to my fate and howled.

There was a sound of voices near at hand, a moving back of chairs upon a flagged floor; a door opened at the other end of the verandah; it was probably an "aged pilgrim," clothed in the guise of a very decrepit, unattractive-looking old man, who looked out; another door was unlatched behind us and Nurse appeared, accompanied by a feeble withered old woman, with a considerable show of grey hairs on her chin. The place seemed sud-

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denly to teem with people, but Nurse's presence restored me from my panic-stricken despair, and I was walked off, as soon as my hat had been straightened and my tie replaced in its proper position.

My feelings of confidence in Nurse were, however, greatly shaken, now that I found she could decoy me into such a perilous place as the "Home of Rest," and that evening I poured out my trouble into my mother's ears.

Nurse never suggested a repetition of her visit, and *I* never suggested going to the Emu field again. It was much too near to the "Aged Pilgrims," to make it feel at all safe, and, in fact, the reflection of how close we had often been to the unknown peril, threw a sort of retrospective danger upon our pleasant intercourse with the Emu.

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## POWERS OF DARKNESS.

"THE dark" is such a hackneyed form of terror that we are apt to forget that its power is still as overmastering as ever to each individual child that comes under its sway. Though burglars, ghosts, or even wild beasts may have been carefully weeded out of Mamma's vocabulary, though Nurse may be too religious ever to mention anything supernatural except an angel, still each child must pass through a period in which night holds its own relentless rod of fear over it. It is none the less terrible that the child hardly realizes the

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fact itself, and in the daytime proudly denies any dread.

"Oh! *you're* not afraid of the dark, are you?" someone asks recklessly, and one promptly says "Oh, *no!*" forgetting how wistfully one watches the shutting of the nursery door,—the fast narrowing slit of light, dwindling down, till, when it is close shut, there is only a comfortless thread of gold; forgetting too, how rapidly one dives beneath the bedclothes when a fitful gust of grim imagination sweeps through one's mind, suggesting the presence of some altogether shapeless phantom, horrible with undefined gruesomeness. Of course such things occur, but one does not recognize in them the idea of "being afraid of the dark."

As for ghosts, I scorned the suggestion, priding myself upon the robustness of my

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disbelief. Later I deeply regretted my boastfulness upon this point, for when I was perhaps eleven or twelve,—an age when one certainly could not have expected to be overtaken by such fears,—they made an invasion, which, though it only lasted a short time, was very painful, and, worst of all, I realized that I could not expect that sympathy now which I had cast from me, "years ago when I was quite small."

One of my greatest anxieties in connection with the dark, was, lest by some mishap, I should not be in bed by my usual hour. If I was not in bed by eight it seemed to me impossible to control either my fears or my tears for a moment.

Oh, the stratagems I have often been at to prevent being late,—stratagems sometimes most pathetic! Had I only found

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words to explain my dread I might have gone off to bed without let or hindrance. But I could not; and often did a shadow cross my mother's heart as I rose suddenly from something I was doing, with what I thought was a well-considered blind,—"Please mothie, I told Nurse she needn't come down for me to-night because I can go up alone."

"What a hold that dull unemotional nurse has over the children," she would think with just a tinge of disappointment that I seemed to care so little for her own efforts to amuse me.

If she could have seen into my mazy little mind, she would have seen nothing but devotedness to her, and an implicit belief in her above everyone else in the world. But, far stronger still, blinding me

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at times to everything else, was the wild terror of the late hours of night which I had no strength or courage to oppose. It held me like some mesmeric power. It seemed below my consciousness, independent of anything so governable as thought. At the hour of bedtime or a little before it, it would come upon me like a frenzy. I could bear the drawing-room no longer;—it was becoming dreadful, dangerous;—what excuse could I make? How could I save myself?

I remember once my mother suggested as a reason for my wishing to go, that perhaps I had a headache. I had never had such a thing in my life, but I hailed it as a new loop-hole of escape, and for a time 'worked it' largely. Probably too largely, for my mother after a while grew

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sceptical, and I felt there must be some flaw in my unconsciously feigned malady. I remember considering it a difficult point to decide even for myself, whether or no I really had a headache. If I screwed up my eyebrows and thought hard about my forehead, I considered the slight resulting sensation might reasonably be called a headache, but I had my doubts as to whether this was exactly what other people felt when they had one.

It was on Sunday evenings that I was most painfully conscious of the fact that everyone thought me extremely silly to hurry away in this singular fashion. The whole family spent the evening together either in the cosy drawing-room, with all the familiar appurtenances of the day, or in summer time in the garden watching the



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sun's stately march down the western sky, and I felt certain that no one could help noticing my hurried "good-night." Not that this made me hesitate for one moment as to whether I should go or stay; it made going more painful, but not a whit less immediately necessary.

If anything could have tempted me it would have been the hymn-singing which formed part of the evening's occupation, and in which I already prided myself. My soul was thirsty for distinction, and I thought that here there was a chance of it. I had once been allowed to sing a verse of a hymn alone. I was not perfectly certain that this was a sign of approbation; it might have been merely some sort of test, but I inclined to the flattering view which I thought also was favoured by other

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slighter signs. But even in order to have the pleasure of singing, "Hark! the Herald Angels," in which I fancied I most signally shone, I would not delay a moment, but separating myself noiselessly from the rest, would creep up to my mother, kiss her, and silently flee upstairs, with what ignominy, shame, and yet compulsion, I cannot describe.

Why could I not be 'brave' like Lettie, and stay just till the hymns were over? Why must I make a fool of myself before all my little world? Why must I forego the indulgence of my pride? If I could have answered these questions I should not have been the strange, inarticulate, incomprehensible thing—a child.

It can easily be imagined what a withering blight this nervous fear threw upon

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any evening festivities. We had one yearly invitation, which for a time ceased to give me any pleasure, and I used to find myself employing all my diplomacy either to get myself left at home, or else to manœuvre an early return for the whole party.

One afternoon—it was in the beginning of March—Lettie came into the nursery with the announcement, "Mamma says we're going to Harriet's to-morrow, to tea; aren't you glad?"

"Yes," I said, from a habit of always agreeing with Lettie; but the actual prospect was very depressing.

Perhaps, however, my cough would be too bad to allow me to go; perhaps Mamma would go with us, and so we should come home early that she might be in time for dinner; perhaps it would rain so hard that

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it would have to be put off to another day, or perhaps the house would be burned down in the night—no one should be hurt,—I pictured feats of daring on my own part,—and the expedition to-morrow would be thereby put quite out of the question.

But to-morrow came. Our house still stood untouched by the wished-for fire. My cough was unnoticed, and no one seemed to heed the steady downpour of rain.

Harriet, my mother's old nurse, had been the good genius of her orphaned childhood. Now in a silver old age, living in rooms in the same old-fashioned suburb where my mother was born and brought up, she shed upon *our* childhood the same demoralizing and delightful influence which a woman showers upon her grandchildren. She was

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vivacious, but I never remember being frightened by her quick remarks. Although she was critical of our nursery arrangements, there was no sting of bitterness in her criticisms, and though she was sometimes severe, she knew when to relax a rule, and so received the affection always paid to a 'treat giver.' Her loyalty and devotion to my mother and to all of us was most complete, but her own individuality was never lost in that of those to whom she devoted herself. She was full of ways of amusing us, and I always felt a confidence that I had only to run to her, plant my elbows on her lap and ask her to "tell me something," and I should be certain to draw out "something" delightful.

Even now I can recall the faint aroma, which I always connected with her black

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silk aprons, and with it there comes up a swarm of half-remembered images, described in her gentle sing-song tones; the old man and his donkey of the fable, Little Anne and her mother, with all their moral reflections upon the coach, and the beggar in Cavendish Square; poor pinless Matilda, who, driven to desperate extremes, "cut her pincushion in two" in her search for a pin, and who finally heard the coach rumble off while "Poor Matilda was not in, for want of just one single pin." There was "The Little Chimney-sweep," too, and a host of others. It was from her telling that I learnt of Frances; a portrayal of human nature which was naturally incomprehensible to me. Frances on going to a party at a friend's is strictly enjoined by her mother to return at nine o'clock. That

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she should have had the slightest wish to stay as late as nine seemed to me impossible, but that her mother should so realize the strength of the temptation as to provide a reward for her obedience in the shape of the "love-bird man," who appears on the scenes at the appointed hour of nine, and from whose stock of birds she is allowed to "choose a pair,"—all that was past believing. *I* would not have stopped even to choose my love-bird, if *I* had ever come back at so dreadful an hour. Still, the story lost none of its interest on this account; it only lessened Frances's virtue and heightened her mother's generosity, and I always longed earnestly that by any so easy piece of obedience I could have had "leave to choose a pair," too.

But I have strayed.

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All the morning I entirely forgot the coming gloom. When life has only run six years of its course, it has not yet taught us to look forward to our woes. We meet them with eyes that are blindfold until our trouble is upon us, and then they are dazed with tears. We do not know what it is to watch with telescopic forethought, our sorrows before they reach us, gauging their height, depth, and breadth, and all their capacities for distress,—even imaginatively tasting their bitterness before we actually close with them, as we learn to do later. Nature is kind to us then, kinder than we know, and although the pain may be intense while it lasts, it does not forerun the actual fact.

So this morning I threaded beads and built brick castles in tranquillity. After

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dinner, however, my peace was broken. I had been playing about beneath the nursery table, when looking up from beneath it, I saw a new pair of stockings hanging over its edge. Those were for me to wear at Harriet's, no doubt! My fear took the face of courage. "Nurse, have I got to change my stockings?" I said.

"Why, yes! you don't think you can go in those to Harriet's?"

"Shall I put them on now?" I said with a vague sense of facing the danger and perhaps getting through it somehow more quickly.

"Yes! you can put them on now, if you like, and then you must come and have your frock changed."

So there was no way out of it, and as I could not find words to tell anyone my

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trouble, it must go unsaid, and I must bear my heavy little burden by myself.

My Sunday frock and jacket were put on, and we drove off in state in the fly. I enjoyed the drive, for the coachman was a man for whom I had a great, though entirely unexpressed, affection. If I met him now I should have to nod to him and hope he would recognize in me a friend,—though of course, an inferior. Somehow or other he must have represented to me an ideal, though an ideal of what I have now no notion. He was a short, thick-set man, with bushy grey whiskers and a double chin, and when I peeped in at 'his' livery stables, as I always did whenever we passed that way, on the chance of seeing him, I remember thinking he looked marvellously stout off the box; but nothing could shake

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my admiration. It was a privilege to be driven by him, and I remember on this particular occasion, twisting my neck painfully in trying to see whether he wore gloves, and then being quite too much ashamed of my curiosity to explain how the thing happened.

Harriet's rooms were above an ironmonger's. I walked up the steps and passed in at the private side door, with a deep sense of pride. To be so much in the secret of such a recognized institution as a shop seemed to me, was a most exalting thing. If only *we* lived above an ironmonger's! (I always thought of the shop as a silversmith's till I discovered that my mother did not in the least know what I meant when I spoke of Harriet's silversmith.) How delightful it would be to be able to go into the shop whenever you liked,

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—have anything you wished for, without paying for it, of course,—not be obliged to go away when you had got all you wanted, —be allowed to walk behind the counter, or make the call-bell ring, by opening and shutting the door, even when you did not need to buy anything or call anybody. Of course in only visiting above a "silver-smith's" one could not expect to do all these things, and this afternoon as usual we passed straight on up the narrow staircase.

I always felt peacefully happy when I went into Harriet's room. Everything looked just as it had done last year,—there was nothing new to shake my confidence. I could not have imagined that the things which were there had not always looked exactly the same as they did when I knew

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them, nor that they had been got together by any series of casual circumstances. To me they seemed as though they were the only set of things that could possibly ever have been there.

Those green glass vases at the ends of the mantel-piece were always filled with dried grasses, and one could count on being allowed to take them down and look at the painted humming birds back and front. Then there was the china dog which whenever we touched it, provoked a bark from Harriet. You will hardly believe how exactly like a real dog's Harriet's bark was, and you might even think that the pleasure of hearing it would have worn off; but it was always delightful, more so indeed when there was no surprise about it. It was old and familiar, gave us no shock, and

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yet always roused our wonder. Next came a pen-wiper in the form of a barrister with wig and gown, kept from wiping pens and elevated to this important position, I fancied out of compliment to my grandfather's connection with the profession. Next a clock, then a little china candlestick with an ornamental red candle in it; a cat, fellow to the dog, but silent, and then you had reached the green glass vase at the other end. The only things which were ever new in that room were the photographs, but they did not disconcert me. As often as not they were photographs of ourselves, or, if not of ourselves, then of cousins, so they brought no sense of unknown people entering Harriet's world and leaving traces behind them which we were not privy to. The one exception to this complete feeling of security

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from unknown people was Mr. and Mrs. Davies, "silversmith" and wife, Harriet's intimacy with whom was a little difficult to me to accept. I did not know them, they had no connection with my world except through Harriet; and they seemed to me to be quite outside and, consequently, a little dangerous. However, as she spoke of them but little, and I saw them in the flesh downstairs and knew who they were, I did not mind them much.

Harriet herself was always the same; her grey curls and pretty black lace cap trimmed with purple ribbons, her sweet faded face with a soft down upon her still pink cheeks, and her indispensable black silk gown. Our visit always went through a regular course. First, greetings, which were lengthy and included everyone's

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health, to which we replied seriously and with detail. "Mamma's quite well, and she said we could say she's better than when you saw her last." "Yes, baby's quite well, and she's going to come and live in *our* nursery very soon, Nurse says." "Janie has a cough, rather, but she's well enough to go out, and Dick's quite well, thank you, but he pinched his finger-nail yesterday, and to-day it looks as if he had been 'inkying' it, and he cried all the time Nurse was bathing it."

Second on the programme, was taking off hats and jackets and changing our boots for strap shoes, during which *our* conversation was usually silenced by Nurse and Harriet, who interchanged remarks supposed to be below our hearing and above our understanding, some of which I heard



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nevertheless, and stored in my memory till I could translate them into sense. Part of the conversation that day, which puzzled me completely then, I have since found out was upon the absorbing topic of the newly-arrived baby, so disguised under the mysterious use of the terms "she" and "it," that I understood nothing.

The third item was tea. I hurried in a little anxiously from the bedroom this afternoon, I remember, and hitched myself on to a seat at the tea-table before I had been told where to sit, and had not the 'finger-biscuits' looked as delicious as ever, I must have cried with shame when Harriet said, "Oh! you've brought a little starved child to tea with me to-day!"

Harriet always gave us the same things for tea, and those 'finger-biscuits' were an

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important feature; but even those and the pleasure of drinking out of cups, which Harriet kept sacred for our use from one visit to another, could not keep my mind from running on the danger of our going home late. "You shall wash up your own cups and saucers, for a treat," said Harriet, and Lettie smiled and said, "Oh! thank you." I murmured the same formula, but my fears murmured, "Perhaps Harriet does not wash up till long after she has done tea, and now we shall have to stay, even if it's ever so late."

"Mr. and Mrs. Davies want to shake hands with my little visitors," remarked Harriet presently, "but we shall have to wait till Mr. Davies comes in."

"Why must we wait for Mr. Davies?" I asked, to everyone's amazement, and

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Nurse assured me, "Oh! you'll like to see Mr. Davies; he's a nice, kind man."

What did *she* know about it, with her glib contradiction of fact? I knew perfectly well that I did *not* want to wait to see Mr. Davies, and I knew perfectly well why! Nurse's re-assurances could not pacify that burning terror which was consuming every other thought.

After tea we were allowed to bring footstools and sit looking out of window, and I thought perhaps Harriet had forgotten about the teacup-washing, and hoped that the promised treat might be passed over. Lettie frightened me terribly once, when my thoughts had for a moment wandered from my fears, by asking, "Did you wash"—(how stupid Lettie was!)—"Mamma when she was quite a little

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baby?" That was all, and no one had taken the hint. I looked out of window hard, lest any anxious glance of mine should make someone else look towards the unwashed tea-things. It was getting much too late to begin the washing-up now.

But when would Mr. Davies come? I kept a watch for him round the corner which I settled was the one where he must appear, and I was certain he did not pass it without my seeing him, for I did not take my eyes off the spot. We seemed to sit there for hours, and still no Mr. Davies! I thought—I had thought so several times already, but without being able to screw up courage to speak—that now I could positively bear it no longer, and that we *must* go home, when to my supreme relief

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Harriet said, "Now we'll go downstairs, and you shall say 'How do?' to Mr. and Mrs. Davies, and we must see if they've got any 'silver new nothings, to hang at your side.'"

The words, though I did not quite grasp what they meant, seemed to promise well, and to anyone who understood them rather better than I did, it must have seemed quite extraordinary to see me burst into tears. Their force had been gathering silently as I stared out of window, and I had bravely kept them back, till now, when the strain was over, they flowed in spite of myself.

I hung behind as we went downstairs to give my tear-stained cheeks an extra moment to dry in, for it would have been too humiliating to have them noticed by Mr. and Mrs. Davies. Once inside the

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shop, however, all distressing thoughts vanished. Mr. Davies—(by the way, how had he got home without my seeing him?)—was a little old man, with a clean-shaven face—a great recommendation in my eyes—and his first words put me at my ease: "Oh! this is little Miss Tib, isn't it?—that's so fond of pussy-cats. You must come and see my little kittens. They've been expecting to see you all this afternoon," and, to my infinite delight, he produced an old hat, in which two tottering kittens were scrambling over one another.

"Were these kittens 'silver new nothings'?" I pondered as I kissed them reverently, hardly venturing to lay hands on them.

But Mr. Davies did not offer me to accept either one or "the pair" (as I

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was quite prepared, like Frances, to do), and I went on fondling the little furry creatures with a sense that I had overstepped the bounds of propriety, if only in my thoughts, and it was almost a relief to me when Harriet, calling me to the inner room, gave me an excuse to leave the kittens to go to sleep in their hat. Lettie stood beside the table in the middle of the little back parlour, making her choice from among a trayful of napkin-rings. I pressed close up to the table beside her, and looked over the edge of the tray. It was full of steel napkin-rings of various ornamental kinds, and I felt at once that Lettie's heart was set upon a particularly large one, though she had not as yet come to the speaking-point. There was none as large left for me, and though the girth of Lettie's

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huge one was by no means necessary to contain my 'feeder,' I should not have cared to choose a smaller one for myself. Fortunately at that moment I saw, lying half hidden in a corner of the tray, a necklace of huge pearl-coloured beads. It was certainly odd to find a necklace among napkin-rings, but to *me* it only appeared a most lucky discovery, which would happily solve my difficulty. They had *meant* me to choose one of the napkin-rings. True; but Mrs. Davies had only *said*, "Now which of these pretty things are you going to choose?" and I was sophist enough to prove to my own satisfaction that the term, "these pretty things," as properly included the beautiful necklace as the napkin-rings —some of which I even thought ugly. I drew its length from under the green baize

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lining, which almost hid it, and held it towards Harriet.

"This, please," I said.

Harriet was no Puritan, and though she had intended me to choose a ring, which would have been a useful, order-inducing present, she bravely held to her intention of allowing me free choice.

I had never possessed any sort of trinket in my life before, and it was bewilderingly delightful to hear the feeble click of the clasp as Harriet fastened it round my neck, and to feel the great bubble-like beads flopping around me as I skipped round the shop. I would wear them always—Lettie could only enjoy her ring at meal-times—I would keep them till I was quite, quite grown-up, and I would learn to "do" the clasp myself, so that I could take it off and

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look at it as often as I liked, and then put it on again, without needing anyone's help. It was delicious to burrow my chin behind the loop of beads, so that I might feel their warm surfaces upon my lips. It was so fascinating, indeed, that my mind had barely room to contain my whole ecstasy. Every other idea had vanished—squeezed out of existence by this one huge emotion.

Consequently I entirely failed to realize the rest of the visit. My senses were in a daze of pleasure, which blinded me to all that went on outside of me. We must have left the shop—must have gone through all the long processes of dressing again for our drive home—have been kissed and bidden "Good-bye," and settled ourselves into the carriage. But I know nothing of it all, and I knew nothing at the time.

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I probably slept as we drove. As we slackened pace up the long hill which made the last part of our journey, however, I became conscious of watching the mysterious phantom shadow of a carriage, which at regular intervals seemed to hurry up behind ours, and dash forward into the night in front.

"If only *our* fly went as fast as those shadow carriages," I thought to myself, "we should get home very quickly. If we had come all the way as fast as they do, I might have been in bed by eight."

But the idea brought no misery of regret at its non-fulfilment, for one of my childhood's terrors lay dying, while the pearl necklace hung triumphantly round my warm neck.

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# THE STORY OF A BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

IT must have been some time in October when the first event of this story took place, for the row of lime-trees in front of the nursery-windows were showing only a chequered mesh of yellow in place of their summer wall of green.

We—(as twins all our doings were together, though we proudly denied that they were *necessarily* so: it certainly always *happened* that we did precisely the same things, in precisely the same way, but we stoutly maintained that we *could* differ)—we were still at the happy age when as yet lessons did not swallow up the main

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part of the day, and life's great duties of amusing oneself, thinking and experimenting, held their proper place.

On this October afternoon we were both in a state of anxious excitement. Mamma had given us a note to take to Miss Grayling, and we were to go at once. Lettie, altogether a more restrained creature than I, and taller by at least two inches, had her hat and gloves already on, while I was still wrestling with the bow of my shoelace. My pride in my errand demanded a consistent dignity throughout.

At length, however, the bow was poked through to my satisfaction, and I had wriggled into the last corkscrewy finger of my newly-washed cotton gloves, and then, with a burden of responsibility and glory we slammed the hall-door behind us, and

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walked forth alone into the great public world.

I remember looking back after a step or two to make sure that no base nursemaid was dogging our free motions by 'giving an eye' to us from the nursery windows, and I was relieved that for once they had realized how entirely we could be trusted out alone. To tell the truth, the whole expedition might have been supervised by the nursemaid, for, from the vantage ground of those windows our whole course of two minutes' walk could be plainly seen. But to-day there was no ignominious watch.

Under the lime-trees we walked,—not scuffling madly through the dead leaves as we should have done had Nurse been with us,—for to-day we must prove ourselves equal to the trust laid upon us.

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Down the familiar row of houses—past No. 5, No. 4, No. 3, No. 2, No. 1 we went:—we were well out in the vast world now, and might meet with any sort of adventure:—across the road, up the high step on to the pathway, and now we were inside Miss Grayling's porch.

Ah! as usual, we had forgotten how fearfully high up the bell was fixed. On one occasion, indeed, we had had to return without ever reaching it, but we were grown so much since then, that Lettie's height generally met the requirements of the case now. Still, it needed much pushing on my part and standing on the scraper on hers, before we heard the welcome 'wangle' of a bell, somewhere in the deep recesses of the house. Then a dread pause, and we feared the door was never

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going to open, and yet when we thought it might do so, we dreaded to face the servant inside. She might be deaf, or we might not find words to explain our errand so that she would understand it, or she might think we were beggar children—always a dreaded possibility with me—and then she would turn us fiercely from the house.

Suddenly a footstep sounded, and the door was thrown open by a little thin old butler, who asked us to walk in.

I, as chosen spokeswoman, gulped, drew a hasty breath, and blurted out, "Mamma said we might ask to see Miss Grayling."

The words seemed to work admirably. He led us across a dark, but not alarming hall, and opening a door, showed us into a room, telling us that Miss Grayling would be with us in two or three minutes.



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I can see the room now, with its wide French windows, darkened by a verandah outside, its dark crimson carpet, of the most homely and unpretentious shade, to which we stood glued like statues (for it was a point, almost of morals, with us, never to move an inch in a strange room where we were left alone). In front of us was the mantel-piece, with the ubiquitous cut-glass chandeliers (not quite so handsome as our own similar ones, I thought), two bits of coral and two shells, each nestling on green crotchet-work, and a clock with a face which seemed entirely made up of jerking wheels, and, as far as I could make out, did not tell the time at all. Dark wood book-shelves, stacked with solemn, respectable books, seemed to make a lining of dingy blackness to the room,

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and threw into brilliant relief the pools of sunlight which lay on carpet and table-cloth. Like a steam, the motes flickered golden in the shafts of sunshine,—their silent dance giving a motion, which only seemed to intensify the stillness.

There was in the room, besides, that comfortable smell which belongs to old-fashioned dining-rooms, and which always seemed to me to indicate that the tea, sugar, and best cake were kept, ready to hand, in the sideboard cupboard.

I had just got to wondering, as I always did after about two minutes' waiting, whether the butler had forgotten our existence, and in that case what would become of us, when Miss Grayling herself put an end to this train of thought.

Now Miss Grayling was always perplex-

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ing to me. "What sort of a person was she? Was she old, like Mamma, or young?" She *looked* young, and yet I did not think she really was so. Mamma would surely not write notes to anyone who was not old. This evidence seemed to show that she must be quite ancient, and yet I could not feel satisfied upon the point in my own mind.

I know now what my difficulty arose from, but then I should not have been able to give you any explanation, although the feeling that I could not quite make her out was enough to put a final bar in the way of her ever winning my friendship. The fact was that she wore her hair in short, crisp, curling ringlets all over her head. The fashion must have gone out some time before this, and I can have

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known no one else who wore their hair as she did. Miss Grayling, in consequence, was *sui generis*, and beyond my power to classify. For the rest I remember her as a bright-eyed, broad-browed, gentle-looking woman, with sprightly motions, and a kindly air about her, that one would have imagined attractive to children; but with me, the one fact, that her hair looked different from other people's, outbalanced everything else.

Our message was scrupulously delivered word for word, for our consciences in those days were tender as spring-buds, and "Mamma wished us to thank you for the flowers," was eagerly corrected by Lettie to "Thank you very much," lest some evil might result from the omission. Then, without resenting the interruption, I con-

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tinued, "Please we have brought you this note, and—and—" I could not remember the last item, but Lettie supplied, "She sends you her love."

We stood with our hands behind our backs while Miss Grayling read the note. I wonder now what it contained—inquiries as to a servant's character, the promise of a subscription to a charity—who knows? All alike far beyond my comprehension in those days, when I was too ignorant even to be curious about the doings of grown-up people.

But business over, we spent a delightful half-hour in Miss Grayling's garden, where were gold-fish and a see-saw. These alone would have been enough, according to our ideas, to furnish forth a perfect Paradise; but over and above these advantages was a thatched summer-house, with four 'season-

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windows.' If you do not know the attractions of this special form of glazing, I cannot render it here for you. You must wait till, with the imagination of childhood, you can look through a tiny bright blue glass diamond, and suddenly see the green and brilliant colours of a summer garden turned to livid snow. Still kneeling upon the seat inside, you must scramble round on your knees to the next. Here spring, with its green diamond, throws a dazzling newness over leaf and tree, and one remembers last spring,—now so long ago,—quite vividly. The next diamond is orange,—rather a perplexing colour,—which seemed to make the garden look just like what I pictured the deserts 'in the Bible.' Was that summer or autumn? It would have been disloyal to suggest that there was any

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real difficulty here; that the 'summer-house builder,' for instance, had not a perfectly clear idea which season was suggested by the yellow glass; but it always left me—the *two* last panes always left me—with rather a sad feeling that I did not yet realize the seasons definitely enough to be able to say which the red and orange respectively signified. The red might show the blazing summer-heat, and the orange the autumn leaves, or you might just as reasonably take precisely the opposite view. One was obliged to leave problems of such difficulty till one grew older.

We were naturally shy children, quickly roused to the idea that we were not wanted, and when we came back into the dining-room, the sight of two pears and a plate of cake upon the table, which I instinctively

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felt would be offered us to eat, gave me also a sense that we had outstayed the proper time of our visit, and I suddenly turned to Miss Grayling with "Please may we go home now? I think we ought."

It was partly that in my enjoyment of the gold-fish and the seasons I had become totally unconscious of the responsibility of visiting by ourselves, to which the duller atmosphere of the house probably woke me afresh; but the remembrance now made me feel that I must take active steps towards returning to the bondage and security of home. Fortunately Miss Grayling took upon herself to interpret Mamma's probable wishes, and authoritatively assured us that Mamma did not want us at home yet, and she would not mind our stopping to eat those pears. Which information there was

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of coure no gainsaying, and I felt no doubt that somehow or other grown-up people had superior means of knowing what other grown-up people desired.

I felt myself the older and the grander a great deal by those pears. To eat them off a dessert-plate with a knife and fork was a dignity unattained at home, where one had tit-bits from anyone's plate as a rule,—certainly never a whole pear for oneself. I felt somehow that we were being treated with such ceremony as only 'grown-ups' usually received. Why I had this notion I don't know, for as a matter of fact it can only have been our extreme youth which could have inspired Miss Grayling with the happy idea of pears and cake at that hour of the afternoon; but I believed it to be otherwise, and felt proportionately

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elated. That pear-eating, indeed, put such courage into me, that I ventured a little conversation.

"We're very fond of flowers," I said tentatively.

"Oh! are you? That's very nice," and then turning to the sideboard, Miss Grayling pointed to a flower in a pot upon it. "I wonder if you know the name of *that* flower?"

"No, I don't," I said, still gravely, but with a freedom that would have been impossible before the pears. "We haven't a flower like that in our garden. Please will you tell me its name? Papa is very fond of flowers, and I don't think *he* knows its name, and I should like to tell him its name."

"It's rather a hard one for such a little

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person as you to remember, I'm afraid. It's nearly as long as you are high."

This disconcerted me, and I felt once more a little uncomfortable. Was this a covert hint as usual that I had grown too slowly?

But Lettie, with her two inches of extra height, was not so susceptible on this point, and replied for me, "I think we can remember it together if you'll tell it to us."

"Very well, you shall kiss me, and say good-bye first, and then I'll tell you the name, and you shall scamper straight home before you forget it."

At the door she pronounced it to us, but we never grasped the tremendous whirligig of sound in which it ended. All we could say to each other as the door shut behind us was "'Eucomus,' that's all I can say."

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"Never mind," said Lettie earnestly, "if we mind and not forget that, I expect Mamma'll be able to make it out."

"Eucomus, Eucomus, Eucomus," we murmured together as we ran home as fast as our legs would bear us,—all our former dignity gone under the pressure of 'Eucomus.'

"Eucomus," we muttered, as we stood on our own doorstep; "Eucomus," as we dashed to Mamma's sitting-room.

But Mamma was not there. She was doing what we most disliked—'having visitors' in the drawing-room.

"Eucomus," we ejaculated between our exclamations of disappointment. "What shall we do? I know I shall forget it. 'Eucomus,' that's it still, isn't it, Lettie?"

Finally, still murmuring, we withdrew to

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the nursery, where we confided our difficulty to our good, but not usually enthusiastic, nurse.

To-day she surprised us by being so condescending, and taking so much interest in our plant, that we felt our eagerness quite kept in countenance by her notice of it.

"Well now, you shall tell me the name, and I'll write it down for you somewhere," and with an audacity which almost scared me, she scrawled down the mysterious word in the lid of the nursery work-box.

Really, what with those pears, and Nurse's marvellous encouragement shown by her going such lengths as to invade the hitherto sacred area of the nursery work-box lid with our name, we felt ourselves becoming very important people in the world.

It was this, I imagine, which sent us

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down to the drawing-room after tea with an unusual amount of assurance, undamped even by our finding Mamma busy writing.

"Mamma, we've seen a new flower; it's something like a hyacinth and an orchid mixed."

It was disappointing to be answered with "How nice, I must hear about it presently."

'Presently' is so long to wait for, and we had been bursting to give our account all the afternoon, so I went on:

"We've got the name upstairs, and will Papa buy it?" I asked in my childish exigence.

"Wait a minute, darling; don't you see I'm busy? I don't know whether Papa wants to buy it. You'd better ask *him*."

It was enough. The wind of my enthusiasm fell dead in a moment. Somehow

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the whole affair sank. Until this point even 'grown-ups' had seemed to admit that it was an important matter, but now I saw that in my mother's eyes it was not so. I said no more. Without a conscious reason, not knowing rightly what I did, I determined that all future action must be in secret.

That night as we lay in bed I raised myself suddenly, and leaning over the end of my crib, I whispered, "Lettie."

"Yes."

"Lettie, you know it's Papa's birthday on the 24th."

"Yes; well?"

"Shall we give him the plant?"

"How could we?" said Lettie, whose ideas had not risen to such possibilities as buying.

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"Buy it," said I, contemptuously.

This was enough for Lettie. Talk of buying, and she became loquacious at once. Never was there anyone better at devising means for raising money—weeding, sewing, tidying drawers for Mamma—she always had a scheme.

To-night she had many, and there seemed every chance of our raising as much as sixpence before the 24th.

Then, out of pure desire for novelty (one always hit out such brilliant plans in bed), I suggested, that to keep our money hoard quite secret, we should actually bury it in the earth—penny by penny as we earned it. At once the proposal was agreed to, and we curled ourselves off to sleep.

Our weeding efforts were great, but not



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highly remunerative. If you weed half a pailful of weeds one day, the next day you find those same weeds only fill a quarter of that same pail. This is a very discouraging fact to the slow weeder, and suggests difficult problems as to when you will be able to claim the penny for the pail—our market price for weeds.

The first three pennies we laid by in a toy-cupboard, as hardly worthy to begin so important an affair as the earth-hole would be. But with the fourth I insisted on starting the new system.

Just lately, Lettie had seemed to hold back about the matter, and now she suggested giving it up.

"I don't see the good of our burying it," she protested.

But that was the main point with me at

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present. I had almost forgotten what we wanted the pennies for, in the thought of how exciting the burying of them would be. Lettie's better judgment evidently looked askance on the scheme, but I did not want her, nor anyone else's, better judgment. The burying, and nothing less, would satisfy me.

But when it actually came it was not quite so delightful as I had imagined it. The earth *would* keep rolling back into the hole, and the first pennies got half hidden before the last were put in. The hole itself was a poor affair, woven about with the tangled roots of a shrub, so that it had no straight walled sides or definite shape, and when we came to cover in the treasure there was so little loose earth about, that we had to leave quite an obvious valley,

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which really might almost have provoked a search. However, as Lettie pronounced it perfectly safe, I tried to be satisfied. Only two more pennies and then we should have our sixpence.

I was half asleep that night when I heard Lettie's shrill whisper from beneath the bedclothes asking if I were awake.

"Do you know," she said solemnly on hearing my sleepy 'yes,' "I believe they might put us in prison for burying that fourpence."

From my earliest years I dwelt in wholesome fear of the law, and to pass a policeman had always needed heroism, but I had rarely pictured myself as being imprisoned; except of course if the Turks, whom I nightly expected, should invade the country. But prisoner of war was different—both

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more glorious and more awful. *This* would, of course, be a matter of chains and a dark cell, and mice, and bread and water, with an uncertain ending, and I was not prepared to face it. Rather, almost, risk everything and run out now and dig up those dreadful pennies.

"How do you know?" I asked desperately, hoping that I should find some flaw in her facts.

"Dick told me all about it one day, but I forgot it till now; it's because it's something about preventing the Queen from having the chance of getting her own money, and it would never do if everyone prevented her, and so, of course, no one may."

Though not lucid, I understood quite as much from Lettie's explanation as I should

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have done if I had had the law explained to me by the whole bench of judges.

"What *are* we to do?" I asked, standing up at the end of my crib, and forcing my warm knees between the cold green bars.

"I don't know," said Lettie with a calmness that might almost have betrayed the fact that she only faintly believed her own statement. She has admitted since, that she felt from the first that it was hardly likely the law could be enforced with such penetrating acuteness as would discover our crime in a few hours of darkness. But having started the theory she was of course bound to give it her support, and finally she argued it out so vividly for my benefit, that she almost scared herself into a firm belief.

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Rarely since that night have I so distinctly realized the agony of a dilemma. On one hand lay prison,—separation from all the known familiar people, places, and doings,—a black confusion of all kinds of dreadful things, of none of which I had any clear idea, except that I imagined them all accompanied by the grim figure of a policeman. On the other hand there was an adventure almost too awful to be thought of. I *could* not screw up my courage to go out *now* and dig up those pennies. After the hour of bedtime the house, whose every cranny I knew by daylight, grew strangely alarming, and when once I had climbed into bed, nothing seemed to me so dreadful as to venture even as far as the nursery passage. The gaslight flared upon one's dazed eyes with a light that seemed fearful

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in the extreme, and the chill of the cold oil-cloth to one's bed-warmed toes was an alarm signal of dangers beyond. In the house *anything* might be doing, and I had an idea that as soon as we were out of the way some new sort of night *régime*, under which one could not in the least foretell anyone's actions, held sway over the household. The servants might carouse in Bacchanalian transports at the mysterious meal of 'supper,' and it was impossible to guess how Mamma and Papa employed themselves after we left them dining downstairs. To go as far as the stairhead would only be possible under the most extreme peril, such as a ghost or a bear, and beyond that,—all the long journey downstairs, through the hall, out of the garden-door and then under the black shrubbery,—of the

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perils that would attend such a journey even my imagination failed to draw a picture.

Nature, however, herself settled for me the difficult question as to what I should do, and I remember no more of our whispered conversation. Childhood's kindest ally was at hand, and sleep's gentle suasion turned me from any deeds of daring.

Morning meant courage, and I felt at once that there was something a little unreal about my anxiety to be up and out. Still I held to my plan. One must be consistent with oneself, in spite of the fact that one's morning and evening selves are entirely different in their views of life.

In my hurry to be up and out I almost forgot to say my prayers, and my present lukewarmness takes even yet a pleasure in remembering how readily I ran all the

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dangers of imprisonment rather than omit the dimly understood duty, when once I recollected it.

Lettie must have forgotten that sword of the law hanging over our heads, for I have no remembrance of her being with me as I rushed downstairs, fled across the thickly-dewed grass, and plunged head foremost through the familiar mazes of the laurel boughs.

A stream of rain-mashed autumn leaves had swept along during the night, and for an instant I pictured that I had hopelessly lost the spot.

"She couldn't find the place anywhere," I murmured to myself. It was a habit of mine whenever I was a little exaggerating my feelings to myself, to put them into words. My life, I felt, was somehow or

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other being made into a story, and these scattered sentences were the out-standing points of interest.

Two minutes' grubbing brought the pence out of their hiding-place, and I instantly thrust them into my pocket. How horrid those dead leaves were, and how disagreeably they took the marks of my grubby fingers on their clammy faces, as I re-arranged them over the ruffled soil in what I hoped was a natural sort of way. Then, leaping out of the bushes, I walked as demurely down the path as I could, far too much afraid to dare to look so. It was safest, I imagined, to wear as bold an air as possible when one stood in danger of being caught in a regular 'policeman' kind of sin, so I was anxious now to face all the world, that no suspicions should be aroused.

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But at this moment the bell rang for prayers, and I had to hurry indoors.

*That* was the climax of the whole incident. Matters usually happened so in childhood. The *real* climax of one's schemes and hopes was forestalled by some such unexpected one as this, and the rest of the affair declined into an insignificant failure. Thus, I am loath to confess, it was now.

The earning of those last pennies must have been more than usually dull, for it has left no mark on my memory. All I remember is that they were earned in some way, and that we then laid our grand scheme of buying the plant before Mamma.

I suppose that I had already some misgivings as to whether sixpence would be quite enough to buy a 'real grown-up per-

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son's plant'—and such I felt 'Eucomus' to be. Or was it only perhaps the result of that almost pathetic deference which children show to the judgments of grown-up people, that made me quietly accept Mamma's proposal?

"I don't quite think you'll be able to get t heplant with this," she said, as she turned over the earthy coppers. "What do you say to buying something from me?"

"There, now," she said, as she reached down from her 'shop-cupboard' an ivory paper-knife with an elephant's head carved on the handle, "if you like, you may buy this of me for sixpence."

That elephant's head was too much for us; we could not resist it, and 'Eucomus' seemed to vanish far away into the background of our desires.

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Yes, we would have that, and we could buy the 'Eucomus' for another birthday, we agreed, and so the matter was settled. But I have always felt that we were a little disloyal to our first scheme, and a little faint-hearted in accepting so readily that elephant, which after all had never had any place in our intentions, and was in no way the result of our own devisings.

As long as the nursery work-box held its position, which it did for many years after this event, the scrawly word inside the lid made its silent reflection on our conduct felt. But that has now been drawn down into the limbo which shrouds most of the companions of my childhood, and the incident was fast sliding from my memory's hold.

At a country house not long ago, my

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eyes were wandering wearily over the orthodox confusion of oak panelling, armour, tapestry, and gorgeous flowers, when they fell casually on a dim greenish spiral which for an instant struck me as unfamiliar. But in another moment the word 'Eucomus' sprang to my lips, and I saw the sunshine on the crimson carpet at Miss Grayling's, and felt my fat legs twisting round the legs of my chair for moral support, as I remarked, "We're very fond of flowers." I heard Miss Grayling's thin, clear voice, suiting itself with tones such as would be reassuring to my shyness, and I felt that subtle union with the past, which harmonizes such strangely differing feelings as those of childhood's perplexing mystery, and the commonplace experience of later years.

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## BLOOD-GUILTINESS.

IT was high summer. We never wore sun-bonnets except in the hottest weather, and I distinctly remember the pleasant starchy crackle about my ears, and the hollow rustle which the skirt of my bonnet made against my print frock, as we strolled into the garden that morning. As we passed by the long flower border to get our croquet mallets from the tool-shed, I remember being filled with a surprising new joy at all the splendour of sunshine and flowers.

I think I could find my way through the labyrinths of that long border still,—though

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less deftly now than then,—when I knew exactly how high I must step to clear the white pinks with their burden of poised bees, how low to stoop to avoid the half-hidden danger of the scraggy moss-rose, and where best to squeeze through the narrow pass between poppy and lily without knocking off a gaudy fluttering petal or bringing down a golden shower of pollen. That bed must always remain for me the standard for every other garden. Whatever boasts of more, will always strike me as being a little self-conscious of superfluity and wanting in pleasant reserve, while one that should lack anything that we had there, is hopelessly wanting in the very essentials of beauty. One must have a long, dark crimson, brick wall, crowned with snap-dragon and wall-flower. A great



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wistaria must spread its arms along the whole length. It should begin in the middle of the wall and have a beautiful and mysterious symmetry about it, which is impossible if the branches spread out on one side only, as they do in inferior gardens I have seen. The wall must be almost hidden by its grape-like bunches of flowers, its soft amber-green leaves, and its curious curling stems. At its feet should grow, as grew there, five or six unrestrained plants of crimson peonies, red-lead coloured poppies, full of dim purple-black dust, which—though I always believed it to be deadly poison—I could not help using, with the yellow dust from the lily, to paint myself a parti-coloured moustache of gold and purple. Then there must be knots of custard-coloured amaryllis lilies,—here and there a

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spire of 'turncaps,'—clove pinks and purple pansies,—patches of tradescantia and veronica, and a few old standard rose trees, full of knotty, ill-shaped white roses that smell like distilled summer. I knew other gardens that had cedar tree avenues or rosaries with clipped hedges, or ponds, but we had none of these things, and this very fact proved that they were unnecessary; but a garden without a bed like ours looked blank, and made me feel inclined to ask, "Then, where's your wistaria?" or, "Where do your snap-dragons grow, if you haven't got a wall?" or, "How do you do without poppies in your garden?"

This long bed bordered on the croquet lawn, and of course, when we reached the third hoop, our balls more often than not rolled in among the flowers, for

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there wasn't even a box border to stop them.

This morning Lettie had the best luck, and already stood in pleasant nearness to the third hoop, while my ball was not only on the wrong side but almost at the other end of the ground, besides. I was a little cross, I know, although it was really much too early on in the game to be getting angry, and I stuck my mallet well under my arm, and with a great rock of my whole body, I hit the ball so that it bounded across the lawn, skipped right over Lettie's ball without touching it, whirled into the bed, and apparently knocked the wall, for Lettie said there was a little sound as if it had rolled against something hard.

The fierceness and failure of my hit brought my anger to a head, and I was

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hot with passion as I followed my ball across the lawn. Lettie was taking aim.

"You might wait till I've found my ball, I think," I said; "I suppose you noticed where it went in."

"No, I wasn't looking; I'm sorry. I think it was about here," and she pointed with her mallet.

I bounced in wildly, and in a moment saw the red cheek of my ball in the space between the main trunk of the wistaria and the bricks. There was only just room to squeeze my arm down between them, and to get it low enough I had to slide down myself with my back to the wall, till I almost sat on the ground—the exertion making my anger burn more hotly in my cheeks than ever. Lettie looked on silently, and refrained from playing.

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"I've got it at last," I said in a ruffled tone. "No, though, I haven't; why—it's Samson,"—for I found that the hard roundish thing my hand had touched, felt colder and more polished, though less even, than my croquet ball would have done, and with a quickness of sense, which we lose later (it is one of the many unconscious glories of childhood), I recognized the shell of our old tortoise.

Now Samson was in no way a special favourite of mine. I did not love him with anything like the tender devotion which I lavished on our dormouse, but I thoroughly respected him. His very name was respectable, for I knew that Samson 'came in the Bible,' and in some undefined way I felt certain that there was a real connection between the two. I believed that

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Samson was actually ten years older than I was, and this naturally gave him a claim upon my respect. There was such a sense of human inferiority in being younger than an animal. And besides, he was one of the great institutions of our lives, which it was impossible to think of as being unnecessary. The garden could never have been satisfactory without chance meetings with Samson—now climbing over a low bit of a box border, or hurrying along the pathway towards you with his tottering walk, always accompanied by the dry 'clitter' of tiny pebbles that he scuffed away from beneath his feet.

"I shall bring him out on the lawn, Lettie," I said; "I haven't seen him for ages; have you?"

"Yes, bring him out. I want to see

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him. But I thought Hemmant said he was lost the other day."

"Lost?" I said scornfully, "how could he get lost with walls all round the garden?" Lettie had no intuition about the ways of animals, and it was shocking, the calm way in which she seemed ready to believe in such a calamity as this would have been.

"Oh, I see. I never thought of that. I only heard Hemmant say he was lost, so I thought perhaps he was," she said, humiliated.

As I lifted Samson up his shell struck against my ball, and it rolled out into an open part of the bed. It must have been lying close beside him. I brought them both out and placed them on the grass. But there was something queer about Samson, which perplexed me. His head

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was thrust from under his shell, much further than usual, and he seemed unable or unwilling (it is difficult to analyze a tortoise's motives exactly) to lift it off the ground. His legs sprawled from beneath him in a dilapidated manner, and he paid no sort of heed to my chirrupping, nor even to a dandelion leaf which I laid before his nose.

"I suppose he's been hiding himself because he was ill," I said gloomily. To tell the truth, this was an opinion I was just abandoning for another much more painful one. No doubt my ball had hit him, and he would die, as it were by my hand.

"We'd better take him down to Hemmant," I said miserably, "perhaps he'll know what's the matter with him, and can give him some medicine. I think I'd

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better carry him in my pinafore, if you'll lift him in for me. He'll be more comfortable like that." I did not relish the idea of carrying a dying tortoise all the way down the kitchen-garden in my hands, with his scratchy feet convulsively twitching against my fingers, and his head, very likely, flopping loosely about.

Hemmant was densely callous. "Oh, yes, yes; I'll look after him right enough," he said crossly, when we had explained our trouble and asked him whether he couldn't do something for us.

"Lor' bless you, don't go troubling your heads about no medicine for him" (he was holding Samson upside down meanwhile with his legs struggling helplessly in mid-air). "He'll find his own medicine when it's right time for it," and with that he

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almost dropped Samson upon a heap of leaf-mould that was banked up beneath the potting shelf.

Hemmant's last oracular remark deepened my fears. "When it's right time for it" might very likely mean that he thought the right time would never come, and I felt that there was the worst to expect. So we retired to the top of the wood-shed—it was the most private place in the garden when the fig-leaves were fully out and you could sit right back among them—and I cried till I exhausted my tears, and could hardly remember what I was crying about. Then we discussed the possibilities and probabilities of Samson's recovering. I confessed to Lettie that I was afraid he had been hurt by my croquet-ball, and that that was really what made him so ill, but as we had no

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idea how hard a hit it needed to injure a tortoise, our conclusions were vague, and varied widely from Lettie's optimistic "We'll hope he'll get all right again soon. I should really think he very likely might; and I don't think he'd feel a croquet-ball much through his shell"—to my despairing lament, "I'm sure I've killed him. I wonder if he's dead yet."

"I shall go and tell Mamma about it," I said at last heroically. I had a lurking hope that she might laugh at my fears. So I dropped down carefully from the projecting roof-gutter and ran in.

My mother promised to go out later and see Samson, and at tea-time she came into the nursery to tell me that she had been, and certainly thought he looked very ill. "But," she said, "he may have

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been ill some time, and your ball might have had nothing to do with it."

"I should think it *couldn't* have had," I said desperately, for drowning men catch at straws, and my conscience smote me dreadfully.

"You may take him out a little milk in an old saucer, after tea, if you like, Tib," she said; and then, looking back as she left the room, I hoped she was going to repeat still more definitely that she thought it was not my fault, but it was only to say to Nurse, "You'll see she has a saucer from the old set, Nurse, and not a new one, please."

It is strange how little grown-up people think about things' dying. Mamma didn't seem to want to cry, though she had known Samson much longer than I had.

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After tea I hurried out, carrying a saucer of milk with much pains, for in a saucer the milk swings up to the edge at the first step, and in my anxiety to get it still again I several times sent it lurching over the opposite side. However, there was still some left when I got to the potting-shed, and I tilted the saucer a little on a hyacinth-bulb that lay in the leaf-mould, and put it quite close in front of Samson.

That night, as soon as we were left alone in the dark, I began to cry again.

"Oh! dear God," I sobbed, as soon as the first delirium of tears was over, "did I do it? Was it my ball, or was he ill before?" But God would make no answer, I knew. It was no good listening. Of course Elijah had heard a still small voice, but *he* lived in the Bible, and, somehow or

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other, had much better reason to expect such things than I. In my heathenism and ignorance I contrived a scheme, which I hoped might produce something. Perhaps God would accept a silent code. So in my prayer I explained it. "If Samson has drunk the milk, may it be that it wasn't my fault, and if he hasn't drunk it, I will understand that it was."

I don't profess that as I prayed this I had much faith that it would work. On the contrary, I hardly expected it at all, but as it was my only chance of comfort, I would not give it up without a trial. Grown-up people never understood things, so that to ask questions of them was all but useless. Indeed, to simply frame most of the problems I wanted to solve would have implied a knowledge sufficient to

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silence the questions for ever;—for the questions a child asks itself are those of life and death, time and eternity, predestination and free-will, identity and change, monotheism and pantheism, good and evil—and these will confound mankind throughout the ages.

But God at least was patient. He did not check my ideas as if they had been sinful, like Nurse, nor turn from my perplexities as other people did, making me feel somehow that it wasn't quite nice of me not to know better than to ask such strange things. God at any rate listened, I felt certain, and though no answer followed, one had at any rate disburdened one's soul in words, and had a dim sense that there must be a solution somehow, though still not understood.

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In the morning I had forgotten Samson, and it was not until after lessons that I thought of going to see what answer had been made to my prayer.

It is very difficult to remember exactly how much milk you left in a saucer over night, and I couldn't be quite sure whether there was less than there had been before, or not. The creamy surface was torn with the frantic struggles of an earwig, who had just reached the shore as I stooped down to examine the milk, and a good many scraps of leaf-mould floated upon it. On the whole, I thought it looked as if Samson *had* drunk. He was always fond of milk but he never drank greedily, and his head was certainly a good deal nearer the saucer now, than it had been when I left him yesterday.



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Throughout the day I visited him often. I stroked his head gently, and he did not pull it in as he usually did. I brought him a lettuce too, and a blackbeetle. I would really have done anything in my power to atone for my sin, if my sin it was, but it is difficult work showing repentance to a tortoise.

So things continued for some days. Samson gave no signs of anything so far as I could see, either of life or death, and my conscience was still a burden to me. Hemmant would give no opinion whatever upon the case, and my mother could not be consulted as she had just gone from home.

Whenever I came within sight or thought of the potting-shed, the weight of my trouble overpowered me afresh. I hated myself and wondered that everyone else did

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not hate me too. I mentioned Samson's name in my morning and evening prayers, and more I could not do, beyond the carrying of his daily saucer of milk.

But things could not go on like this without some change, either for the better or the worse, and on the third day the change came. I had felt a little ashamed all the afternoon, because I had had to admit to myself that my interest in Samson's health had waned a good deal since the day when my anxiety first began. So on this Friday evening I went down to the potting-shed to visit him the last thing before bedtime.

All my worst fears were roused again. His nose was half buried in the leaf-mould; his eyes were only partly closed, but somehow they looked stiff and immovable, and

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his legs lay in positions which seemed to me entirely unusual and peculiar.

I had never seen death, except once, when a thrush had stunned itself at the dining-room window, and I had picked it up, still limp and warm, but quite dead; but *it* had feathers and was altogether comfortably concealed. Nevertheless, I instinctively feared when I saw Samson now, though I tried hard to put aside the idea which would occur to me.

"Lettie," I said, as we were undressing for bed, "I'm afraid Samson's dreadfully ill to-night."

"Are you?" said Lettie awestruck. She had forgotten that he was still on the sick list. "What makes you think he's worse?"

"I don't know. I didn't say he *was*

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worse, but he looked so funny to-night. I wonder how tortoises look when they're dead."

"I wonder," said Lettie. "Couldn't we ask some one?"

But when we asked her, Nurse only said, "Whatever do you ask such questions for? I couldn't tell you what they look like when they're alive, and I'm sure I don't know what they look like when they're dead. What*ever* puts such things into your heads I should like to know."

But I could not tell her what it was. It would have been too terrible to explain what I was afraid of, and as Nurse had evidently forgotten the whole affair, it would have meant recalling all the painful event to her remembrance. So I made no answer.

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The next morning I woke with the cloud still upon me. I could not make up my mind whether to think of Samson as only dying or already dead; but anyhow, I saw trouble before me. In my prayers I resolved to treat him as still alive, and with an earnestness which was deepened by my fear lest it should be useless, I begged that Samson might live, at least for one day longer, till my mother came back. When I had finished, my eyes and knuckles were wet with tears.

I had prayed so hard that I almost thought God must answer me this time, and it was half hopefully that I sniffed the fresh, clear morning air of the garden, as I made my way towards Samson's bed of leaf-mould.

The potting-shed door swung to behind me, and my dazzled eyes peered vainly

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into the black recesses of the heap of earth for some time before I could make out anything. Gradually I recognized the line of the broad wooden shelf above me, the ragged edge of the bit of board that kept the earth from getting strewn over the floor, and now I could make out the handle of a trowel lying close to where Samson ought to be. But still I could see nothing of him.

Oh! there—a little behind—surely! It was round; but then, where was his head? Why no—it was only that cabbage-leaf which I had brought in yesterday to try to tempt Samson with—and—Samson himself was not there at all.

My eyes had by now grown accustomed to the shed, which had no light but what came through the big cracks in the

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door, and I could be perfectly certain that Samson was nowhere visible. But he had a habit of burying himself underground in winter, and although this was midsummer, I thought it would be well to turn the leaf-mould well over before allowing myself to give up the search. If he was gone, it would mean that Hemmant had carried him away, because he was dead. So I sifted all the earth carefully through my fingers, as you do in a bran tub, when you know there's still one parcel left in it. I don't know whether it would have been most horrible to come upon him suddenly deep down in the earth, or to feel, as I actually felt, that every handful that went through my fingers made it more certain that Hemmant had taken him.

"Hemmant" (I called to him across the

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cabbage-beds where he was gathering vegetables), "please, where's Samson?"

Hemmant's face crumpled up into a smile, which warned me not to expect sympathy from him.

"Well, I don't know that I can tell you that," and he screwed his mouth all up to one side of his face, and pretended to look unhappy.

Then I knew Samson was dead for certain, and my thoughts flew to the boundaries of knowledge and put to me the question, "Where is Samson—*really*—the part of Samson that is like the part of us that goes to heaven when we die—or hell?"

But for a few minutes that problem must stand over. For first I must find and bury Samson.

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It was no sham funeral, with a mockery of crape, and playing at being sad. Samson had to be buried properly, and I, as chief mourner, and perhaps chief sinner, must do it; but it would have been an insult to Samson, and the real sorrow I felt, to pretend to imitate a 'proper' funeral.

So I fetched Lettie, and we dug a hole between the big apple-tree and the rhubarb bed. Then we brought Samson on a spade, from under the big pot where Hemmant had put him out of sight. If I had had courage I would have carried him in my hands. It would have seemed more friendly, but I really dared not touch him, except when I was absolutely obliged to.

The hole, of course, was too small when we tried to fit him in, and he had to be

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heaved out before we could enlarge it. Then we had to get a mark of some kind to put by the grave, so that there should be no danger of our ever digging over the place and coming upon the remains; and when all this was accomplished there was the spade and trowel to restore to the tool-shed again.

We were too hot to begin anything further that morning, so we dragged ourselves up on to the shed roof among the fig-leaves. With the last shovelful of earth that I had thrown upon Samson's grave, the question as to where he had gone to came back upon me impetuously. If he went to our heaven, what a crowd of animals there would be there,—all the animals that did not get into the ark, as well as those that did,—all the creatures

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that had lived since, and all those that were alive now; and when I thought how very quickly one could count a hundred animals when we played "Traveller's Whist" in the train my fancy staggered at the thought.

"Lettie, do you think they have separate heavens and hells?" I said after a pause.

"I don't know. If they had, don't you think it would say something about it in the Bible?"

"Well, but perhaps it does. We don't know everything that's in the Bible."

"Oh! but I'm sure we should have heard that part of it, if it was there, because of course that would be a part we should be able to understand," said Lettie dogmatically.

"Well, what does happen to them, then?

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Wait a minute, though; you have a lovely 'hairy-beary' on your 'pinny,' and I want him on my hand. I shouldn't wonder if caterpillars don't have anywhere to go when they die. They only live such a little time, and perhaps being butterflies is their being in heaven."

"Perhaps," said Lettie. It wasn't a point which was easy to argue, and though she didn't quite agree, she had no other suggestion to make.

There was another thoughtful pause, and then I began again. "I say, Lettie, do you know what? I prayed to God last night and this morning to ask him to make Samson live, and you know he must have been dead all the time. Hemmant says he's been dead a whole day. I suppose I oughtn't to have prayed unless I was sure

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he was alive, because you see God couldn't answer me."

"I shouldn't think it'ud matter. He *could* have made Samson alive again of course, only I suppose He knew it was best not to. I shouldn't think there was any harm in your asking."

"No, perhaps there wasn't; but . . . ." I couldn't quite explain, even to Lettie, the lurking feeling of discontent which I still had, that the arrangement by which one could pray for impossibilities was not quite satisfactory.

So Samson died and was buried. There are other children who play in that garden now, and if they ever come across the tile which served him for a gravestone, they have no doubt passed it over, not knowing that it was a landmark in someone

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else's life as well as a sign of something's death.

But I never quite made up my mind whether I was the murderer or not. Sometimes I tried hard to think of myself as guilty, but in five minutes the probabilities on the other side always appeared so forcible that I felt my penitence was hypocrisy, and before I had grown accustomed to it I was obliged to give it up and take to the innocent theory again.

"*If* it had hit his head; well, yes, then I might have killed him easily; but, suppose it was only his shell after all, . . . it couldn't have hurt him, surely. . . ." And so the scale dipped first to one side and then to the other and disturbed me afresh whenever my conscience was a little more sensitive than usual.

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But *now*, I confess with shame it troubles me no longer. I have become one of the Initiated,—a dull-souled, prosaic grown-up person,—and life is no longer the thrilling anxious dream that it once was. Guilt has grown easier to recognize, and repentance and grief are too scarce to be lavished on fancied crimes.

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